



PHD

Making sense of sustained part-time working through stories of mothering and paid work

Macgill, Fiona

Award date:
2014

Awarding institution:
University of Bath

[Link to publication](#)

Alternative formats

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

Copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Access is subject to the above licence, if given. If no licence is specified above, original content in this thesis is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) Licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Any third-party copyright material present remains the property of its respective owner(s) and is licensed under its existing terms.

Take down policy

If you consider content within Bath's Research Portal to be in breach of UK law, please contact: openaccess@bath.ac.uk with the details. Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item will be removed from public view as soon as possible.

Making sense of sustained part-time working through stories of mothering and paid work

Fiona MacGill

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Social and Policy Sciences

August 2014

Copyright

Attention is drawn to the fact that copyright of this thesis rests with the author. A copy of this thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that they must not copy it or use material from it except as permitted by law or with the consent of the author.

Restrictions on use

This thesis may be made available for consultation within the University Library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purposes of consultation with effect from

.....(Date)

Signed on behalf of the Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences

.....

Table of Contents

Tables	6
Acknowledgements	7
Abstract	8
<u>Introduction</u>	9
Why focus on mothers of older children who have sustained part-time working?	9
Overall aim and objectives	11
Outline of thesis	11
<u>Chapter 1. Becoming a mother</u>	13
1.1 Introduction	13
1.2 Motherhood identity	13
1.2.1 The dominance of 'intensive mothering' ideology	13
1.2.2 Significance of identity transformation	17
1.2.3 Motherhood identities: class distinctions	17
1.3 Gendered relationships of care	20
1.3.1 Continuing unequal division of labour	20
1.3.2 'Sharing' childcare	23
1.3.3 'Sharing' domestic work	25
1.4 Reconciling motherhood with paid work	26
1.4.1 'Choosing' work-home status: Hakim's Preference Theory	26
1.4.2 Financial 'need' and 'Gendered Moral Rationalities'	27
1.4.3 Contradictory public discourses and policy	30
1.4.4 Competing pulls on time	31
1.4.5 Justifying work-home 'choice': prevalence of 'othering'	32
1.4.6 Conceptualising the relationship between mother and worker identities	33
1.5 Conclusion	36
<u>Chapter 2. Working in part-time employment</u>	38
2.1 Introduction	38
2.2 Worker/career identity	38
2.2.1 Flexibility, consumption and individualisation	39
2.2.2 Work commitment, centrality and orientation	41
2.3 Gender and part-time employment	44
2.3.1 Defining and describing part-time employment	44
2.3.2 Particular constraints and issues relating to part-time employment	45
2.3.3 Part-time working women in professional/higher level jobs	49
2.4 Gender and 'work-life balance'	51
2.4.1 Discourses of work-life balance	51
2.4.2 Challenges to 'work-life balance'	53
2.5 Mothering older children (and sustaining part-time working)	56
2.5.1 The contradiction between needing to 'be there' and 'letting go'	57
2.5.2 Older children's perspectives of mothers working	59
2.5.3 Impacts of parental work on adolescent wellbeing	60
2.6 Conclusion	61
<u>Chapter 3. A dialogic perspective on dialectics and stories</u>	63
3.1 Introduction	63
3.2 Dialectical theory: engaging with dialogism	64
3.2.1 Introducing Bakhtin and dialogism	65
3.2.2 Reconsidering dialectical theory through a dialogic lens	67
3.3 Dialogism and storied selves	68

3.3.1 Understanding our selves: according to dialogism	68
3.3.2 Storied selves and identities	73
3.3.3 Drawing on Frank: a sociological dialogical approach to stories	75
3.4 Conclusion	79
<u>Chapter 4. Generating and re-telling stories</u>	81
4.1 Introduction	81
4.2 A life story approach	81
4.3 The participants	84
4.3.1 Participant selection	84
4.3.2 Participant recruitment	85
4.3.3 A description of the participants	86
4.4 The storytelling sessions	91
4.5 Analysing and re-telling the stories	93
4.5.1 Dialogical narrative analysis	93
4.5.2 Applying dialogical dialectical theory	96
4.5.3 Re-telling the stories	97
4.6 Research quality	98
4.7 Ethical considerations	101
4.8 Conclusion	103
<u>Chapter 5. Two stories of mothering (as a part-time worker)</u>	104
5.1 Introduction	104
5.2 Cara's mothering story	104
5.2.1 A vanished decade of struggling with not 'being there' enough	105
5.2.2 'Being there' for her young children: better late than never	107
5.2.3 'Being there' for teenagers: they still need me (and I need them)	108
5.2.4 Cara's mothering story: reflections	111
5.3 Sam's mothering story	112
5.3.1 Focusing on making work 'fit' with 'being there' for her children	112
5.3.2 Prioritising 'being there' for her children	114
5.3.3 'Being there' for teenagers: they still need me (and I need them)	115
5.3.4 Sam's mothering story: reflections	117
5.4 Conclusion	118
<u>Chapter 6. More stories of mothering (as a part-time worker)</u>	120
6.1 Introduction	120
6.2 Becoming a mother and working part-time: divergent levels of tension	120
6.2.1 Distinctions in tension relating to work and career	120
6.2.2 Distinctions in tension relating to caring for children	122
6.2.3 Narratives of <i>struggle</i> and <i>prioritisation</i>	126
6.3 Mothering older children and justifying still working part-time	129
6.3.1 Being a 'good' mother: older children's needs	129
6.3.1.1 Growing independence and not being needed as much physically	130
6.3.1.2 Growing need for emotional support: being there and letting go	131
6.3.1.3 Perceived importance of a close relationship and communication	134
6.3.2 Sustained part-time working constructed as <i>enabling</i> 'good' mothering	135
6.3.2.1 Perceived importance of time invested in the past	136
6.3.2.2 Representation of time after school as important	136
6.3.2.3 Linking school-day time to protecting family time and availability	139
6.3.2.4 Justifications for staying part-time (not resuming full-time work)	140
6.3.2.5 Positioning themselves as better placed than stay-at-home mothers	142
6.4 Sustained part-time working and a mother's wellbeing	144
6.5 Conclusion	145

Chapter 7. Two stories of sustained part-time working (as a mother)	148
7.1 Introduction	148
7.2 Joanna's story of sustained part-time working	149
7.2.1 Both going part-time – then following different 'paths'	149
7.2.2 Part-time working and contributing 'differently' but 'equally'	152
7.2.3 Part-time working - being held back and holding herself back	154
7.2.4 Joanna's 'career' story: reflections and reorientation	155
7.3 Sara's story of sustained part-time working	156
7.3.1 Going back part-time and keeping going (against the odds)	157
7.3.2 Making sense of 'career': resentments, frustrations and achievements	160
7.3.3 Sara's 'career' story: reflections and disorientation	162
7.4 Conclusion	164
Chapter 8. More stories of sustained part-time working (as a mother)	167
8.1 Introduction	167
8.2 Resisting a narrative of <i>resumption</i> of a full-time 'career' focus	168
8.2.1 Tension relating to 'career'	169
8.2.2 Tension relating to 'part-timers'	173
8.2.3 Tension relating to 'contribution'	177
8.3 A narrative of <i>reorientation</i>	183
8.3.1 Reframing standards of 'good' working	184
8.3.1.1 Different combinations of reframed standards of 'good' working	184
8.3.1.2 Reframing and supplementation	186
8.3.2 Reframing the meaning of work within partnerships and life	188
8.3.2.1 Reframing 'fairness': moral rationalities of part-time working	188
8.3.2.2 Shifting priorities in life	189
8.4 Looking forward: <i>disorientation</i>, <i>resumption</i> or continued <i>reorientation</i>?	192
8.5 Conclusion	196
Chapter 9. Discussion	200
9.1 Introduction	200
9.2 'Becoming' a part-time working mother: on-going process of negotiation	201
9.2.1 'Choice' and orientation	202
9.2.2 Complicating the notion of 'choice'	206
9.2.3 Theorising construction and negotiation of mother/worker identities	208
9.3 Impacts of sustained part-time working on mother and worker identities	212
9.3.1 Impacts of sustained part-time working on mother identity	215
9.3.1.1 Impacts mainly positive early on, but levels of tension vary	215
9.3.1.2 Positive construction as enabling 'good' mothering of teenagers	216
9.3.1.3 Benefits to maternal wellbeing	217
9.3.2 Impacts of sustained part-time working on worker identity	219
9.3.2.1 Impact on 'career' identity conceptualised as a 'creeping trauma'	219
9.3.2.2 Reorientation: 'career' to alternative means of fulfilment from work	221
9.4 Implications, limitations and considerations for future research	223
9.4.1 Implications for feminist debates	224
9.4.2 Limitations and considerations for future research	227
Appendices	229
Appendix 1: Recruitment advert	229
Appendix 2: Research Project Information Sheet	230
Appendix 3: Background questionnaire	231
Appendix 4: Consent form	232
Appendix 5: Interview discussion guide	233
References	237

Tables

Table 1:	Education and Parental education	86
Table 2:	Age and Children	87
Table 3:	Joint income and Participant's contribution	88
Table 4:	Partner's caregiving and Partner's working hours	88
Table 5:	'Career' paths	89
Table 6:	Shifts in part-time hours and Current part-time hours	90

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the University for funding my studentship, as without this I would not have been able to spend the time on studying, and the Department for conference funding so that I could test out some of my thinking. Over the time of my studies a number of academics in the Department have shown an interest in my work and given helpful feedback for which I am grateful. In particular, Emma Carmel's insightful questioning, my Transfer Panel's constructive criticisms which came at a crucial point, and Kate Woodthorpe's written feedback on all my chapters which has really helped point out where my writing lacked clarity. Thanks especially to Tina Skinner who has supported me enormously intellectually and emotionally. She has been incredibly understanding through difficulties relating to my PhD (particularly encouraging me through the writing that I have struggled with) and those unrelated (of note, the council knocking my house down). Thank you Tina.

My heartfelt thanks to my participants for giving up their valuable time to tell me their stories, and for showing such support for what I was trying to do with this research. Fellow PhDers have been a great source of distraction and have buoyed me up when I needed it – I have appreciated it and hope I have occasionally been able to reciprocate. I would like to thank my friends for not asking too often whether I had finished yet. Also my mother, for her support, as ever. Last, but not least, I want to thank Dunc, Louis and Sadie. I am ever so grateful for your cheery support, and the fact that frankly, you have 'been there' for me more than I have for you, especially over the last few weeks (which is ironic bearing in mind the topic of this PhD).

Abstract

The overall aim of the research was to understand the potential impact of *sustained* part-time working on women's identities with regards to motherhood and work. Despite an implicit assumption in public discourse, policy and research that mothers will resume full-time careers once their children are 'older', half of working mothers with their youngest child at secondary school are working part-time (ONS, Q3, 2011). Often in the literature 'good' part-time working has been framed as short-term (see for example Tilly, 1996). The part-time 'hidden brain drain' (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005) has been described as a waste of education and skills (Connolly and Gregory, 2010) and contributing to gender inequality (Walby, 2007). This PhD explored the life stories of twenty university educated, partnered mothers of older children (youngest at secondary school), who had mostly worked part-time since becoming mothers. Dialogic narrative analysis (Frank, 2010) was used to explore how these women made sense of where they had ended up through their story telling. A key finding is that for these women 'becoming' a part-time working mother was neither an informed 'choice', nor a fixed orientation, but was an on-going process of negotiation, within a matrix of inter-related, constantly shifting and interacting tensions. Compromises to their jobs often became more extensive than expected and a continuing need to 'be there' for teenagers was unanticipated. Damage to 'career' is conceptualised as a 'creeping trauma'. This is considered in light of the mothering stories indicating this was a price worth paying. The majority of women were engaging in a narrative of *reorientation*, using various strategies to reframe standards of 'good' working and the meaning of work within life. Success in reorientation differed according to individual experiences of constraints and opportunities.

Introduction

Why focus on mothers of older children who have sustained part-time working?

This thesis has aimed to understand the impacts of *sustained* part-time working on mother-worker identities of mothers of older children in order to contribute a fresh perspective on debates about combining paid work and parenting. This life-stage is under-researched. Literature on mothering identity and combining motherhood and work often includes part-time working but tends to focus on mothers of young children and particularly pre-school children (Bailey, 1999, Hays, 1996, Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004, Johnston and Swanson, 2006, Vincent et al., 2004). Some literature includes mothers of older children (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson, 2001, Garey, 1999), but this is not the focus. A strand of literature explores links between parenting and adolescent behavior (Dishion and McMahon, 1998, Stattin and Kerr, 2000) and there is a limited literature on older children's perspectives of mothers working (Christensen, 2002, Lewis et al., 2008). Part-time working is examined from an organisational research perspective, for example how it is constructed within organisations (Grant et al., 2005, Jenkins, 2004) and how it is experienced at different job levels (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010), or within specific sectors (Edwards and Robinson, 2001). Some of this research is conducted with mothers of young children, but otherwise tends to be unspecific. Broader literature on work-life balance or flexible working often involves the views of full-time workers and men as well as women (Ford and Collinson, 2011, Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). Bearing in mind that half of working mothers at this next stage of motherhood (youngest child aged 11-16) are working part-time (ONS, Q2, 2011), this is potentially a significant gap. The implicit assumption has been that mothers going back to work part-time with young children will return to full-time when their children are older (Hakim, 2005). Policy has tended to focus on mothers of young children, although the later extension of flexible working legislation¹ to parents of children under 17 acknowledged a potential desire for parental presence for this age group (BERR, 2008).

'Good' part-time work is framed as a short-term holding pattern for a full-time career (Tilly, 1996) and studies have reported mothers as viewing part-time working favorably during early motherhood (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004, Johnston and Swanson, 2006). However, part-time in organisational research is often associated with low pay, low status and few career prospects (Gambles et al., 2006, Vincent et al., 2004). The viewpoint of women who are university-educated and worked full-time prior to children was of particular interest due to the 'hidden brain drain' (Equal Opportunities Commission,

¹ The Flexible Working (Eligibility, Complaints and Remedies) (Amendment) Regulations, 2009.

2005) – referring to research indicating that part-time working women are often marginalised and working below their potential (Grant et al, 2005). This has been described as a waste of human capital in terms of education and skills (Connolly and Gregory, 2008) and contributing to gender inequality (Walby, 2007). In addition to being university educated, a decision was made to focus on women partnered with the father of their children. This was in order to appreciate the impact of sustained part-time working on gender relations, and how this subsequently impacted on mother and worker identities.

The proportion of women in employment has grown considerably since second wave feminism, with two-thirds of women with dependent children now in employment in the UK (ONS, 2011), compared to 30 per cent in 1960 (ONS Social Trends: Scott 2008). However, much of this growth has been in part-time work (Scott, 2008). This level of part-time working is amongst the highest in Europe and is highly gendered (Crompton and Lyonette, 2006). There are still a relatively low number of women making it into ‘top’ jobs (Gallie and Zhou, 2011). Hakim (2004) has argued that women are heterogeneous regarding their work-home ‘choices’ and differ from men in this respect. She has suggested that many women ‘choose’ to prioritise their families and home lives, and this is why part-time working is popular in countries like the UK, where equal opportunities and flexible, de-regulated markets make this possible. Critics such as Crompton (2005, 2008, 2010) have argued that this is gender essentialist and fails to take into account the considerable ideological, structural and material constraints to women’s ‘choices’. Intersectional feminists (Collin, 1991, Crenshaw, 1989) have highlighted that ‘choices’ are experienced differently from different social and cultural perspectives. Feminists calling for equality through dual-earning and dual-caring (see Gornick and Meyers, 2003) contend that the stalling of greater gender equality at work is in part due to the lack of transformation at home, in that whilst fathers appear to be more ‘involved’, the division of labour remains highly gendered, with fathers’ sense of responsibility still focused on provision and mothers’ on children and home. Some feminists focus on a greater need to value care work economically (for example, Crittenden, 2001). Gilligan (1982) argued for maternalism as a positive difference to men, whilst others (for example Fraser, 2013, Williams, 2005) are demanding an ‘ethic of care’ to be placed at the heart of policy making. Hochschild (1997) and Fraser (2013) have proposed that time is a core feminist issue, and call for a re-evaluation of working time and time for caring and relationships. These various different feminist perspectives run through the literature on combining work and motherhood, tying in with distinctive theorising on worker and mother identities.

Overall aim and objectives

Aim: The overall aim was to understand the potential impact of sustained part-time working on women's identities with regards to motherhood and work.

Objectives:

1. Document mothers of older children's accounts of experiences of sustained part-time working and mothering.
2. Analyse how these experiences might impact on worker and mother identities.
3. Theorise how the women were constructing their worker and mother identities.

Outline of thesis

The focus of this study is the impacts of sustained part-time working on mother and worker identities and understanding how women make sense of their experiences of mothering and part-time working. The theme of Ch.1 is 'becoming a mother' and Ch.2 is about 'working part-time'. Separating the two is somewhat artificial as the contradiction between the ideals of mothering and paid work is at the heart of the complexity of working mothers' identity construction. The chapter on mothering therefore incorporates certain aspects of working and vice versa. The first chapter has more of an emphasis on early motherhood and initial settlements regarding work (where there is a large body of literature), while the second explores part-time working more generally and includes mothering of older children (separately, as there is a gap in the literature on combined impacts in later motherhood).

Ch.3 outlines the development of a dialogic² perspective on theories of dialectics³ and stories, whilst Ch.4 describes how this theoretical framework guided the research design with regards to generating and re-telling stories of mothering and working. This process was iterative and drew on a pilot study (MacGill, 2010). This study with eight mothers of older children had identified the potential to use dialectical theory to examine tensions in and between mother-worker identities. It also piloted the use of life stories, establishing these as appropriate for the feminist-inspired objective of appreciating sense making from the perspective of lived experience in order to understand the impact of sustained part-

² Defined by Holquist as a 'pragmatically oriented' epistemology aiming to 'grasp human behavior through the use humans make of language' (1990: p.15), derived primarily from the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986).

³ Johnston and Swanson define a dialectic as 'a bipolar continuum that simultaneously pulls in mutually exclusive directions. Thus any movement toward one end of the continuum creates a stronger pull toward the opposite end' (2007: p.449).

time working on mother-worker identities. A deeper engagement with dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) led to an awareness of this perspective's take on the notion of storied selves. Chapters 3 and 4 describe the process of building on the strengths highlighted in the pilot study of both theory and practice, whilst aiming to overcome the weaknesses. The work of sociologist Arthur Frank (1995, 2005, 2010) was particularly influential.

Chapters 5 to 8 turn to the findings. The first two chapters tell stories of mothering. Ch.5 tells two stories in detail, to be illustrative of aspects of 'analytic interest' (Frank, 2010), rather than to be 'typical'. The two stories show up the use of *narratives* to negotiate experiences and discourses and illustrate identity construction in action. Ch.6 then uses these two stories to discuss resonances and dissonances, making connections and disconnections across the twenty stories. Chapters 7 and 8 follow the same pattern for stories of working. The focus of the analysis in these chapters was on understanding the *work* of the stories, aiming to capture this through identifying the shared narratives drawn on to tell the stories (applying principles of dialogical narrative analysis, informed by Frank, 2010). Within this, attention was paid to *tensions*, and how these were managed (applying dialectical theory, adapted from that used by Johnston and Swanson, 2007).

Having generated and documented mothers of older children's accounts of experiences of sustained part-time working and mothering (first objective), and analysed how these experiences might impact on worker and mother identities (second objective), Ch.9 turns to the third objective. This was to theorise how the women were constructing their mother-worker identities, and the discussion here situates the findings within debates in the literature relating to identity construction. In doing so, it considers implications of the findings for feminist debates relating to combining work and motherhood. In the first instance, this examines identity construction in relation to the problematic notion of 'choice', with reference to Hakim's (2004) contested Preference Theory. Having identified an opportunity for change, the discussion then turns to the overall impact of sustained part-time working on mother and worker/career identities, again making connections and highlighting distinctions with the various strands of literature outlined in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. Limitations of the research are taken into account, and questions for the future proposed.

Chapter 1

Becoming a mother

1.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on 'Motherhood identity', highlighting the dominance of a deeply gendered 'intensive mothering' ideology and the significance of the identity transformation that takes place when a woman becomes a mother. It goes on to explore middle-class distinctions in the construction of motherhood identities. This leads into a discussion on 'Gendered relationships of care' (1.3) examining the continuing unequal division of childcare and domestic labour, despite egalitarian discourses, and why in many cases this division is deemed to be 'fair'. This necessarily involves understanding identities and practices of men as fathers and partners, and the impact on mothering, both practically and ideologically. 'Reconciling motherhood with work' (1.4) indicates that 'choice' of work-home status is problematic and sketches the constraints and competing obligations mothers have to negotiate to come to some kind of settlement. In this context, 'choice' requires justification, resulting in the prevalence of 'othering', potentially entrenching women's positions and pitting mothers against 'other' mothers. The section concludes with a critique of the ways in which the relationship between mother and worker identities are conceptualised in the literature.

1.2 Motherhood identity

A cursory investigation of literature relating to mothering in contemporary, Western cultures reveals the intensity currently required in 'good' mothering and the highly gendered nature of the moral requirements relating to parental caring for children. Key elements of this ideology will be drawn out (1.2.1), relating to the essentialist notion of being 'natural' and the 'morality' of 'good' mothering with its focus on children's needs. This will illustrate its hold over mothers, despite contradictory discourses of devalued motherhood and the rationalised market (Hays, 1996). Feminist debates on mothering will be referenced, which also reflect inherent contradictions. Section 1.2.2 discusses the significance of becoming a mother to a woman's sense of self. Section 1.2.3 then turns to class distinctions in perspectives on intensive mothering and mothering practices.

1.2.1 The dominance of 'intensive mothering' ideology

Motherhood ideology is socially and historically constructed. The concept of what it is to be a 'good' mother, as opposed to a 'good' father, and what is considered socially appropriate with regards to child rearing has varied enormously through history and

across cultures (see Hays, 1996). What is striking in the motherhood literature, however, is the generally accepted dominance, and if anything, intensification of 'intensive mothering' ideology in mainstream US culture (Garey, 1999, Hattery, 2001, Johnston and Swanson, 2006). This is also acknowledged in North European literature, for example in the UK (Bailey, 1999, Vincent et al., 2004) and Sweden (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson, 2001). According to Hays (1996: p.21):

The model of intensive mothering tells us that children are innocent and priceless, that their rearing should be carried out by individual mothers and that it should be centered on children's needs, with methods that are informed by experts, labor-intensive, and costly. This, we are told, is the best model, largely because it is what children need and deserve.

The current dominance of this ideology means that this is held up as the 'standard' for 'ideal' mothering. Much of the literature describes a struggle to achieve these standards, but equally how difficult this ideology is to resist. Two key elements stand out as underlining how it is specifically directed at *mothers* and why it is so difficult for mothers to resist.

The first element is the interweaving of an essentialist discourse of 'natural' mothering into 'intensive' mothering ideology. This relates to the importance of the individual mother, and the 'natural' love a mother has for her child. According to Hays (1996), the ideas and practices regarding child rearing are inextricably bound to this 'natural', selfless, unconditional love and the requirement for the mother to 'be there' for her child. The internalisation of motherhood as biologically determined and 'natural' is consistently demonstrated in more recent literature, for example, in research comparing post-birth experiences with women's expectations and ideals for motherhood during pregnancy (Lupton, 2000, Miller, 2005). Lupton's (2000: p.55) research with mothers-to-be in Australia revealed that 'the women tended to expect that such attributes of 'good motherhood' as love and caring responses to the child would come from 'within', as a 'natural' phenomenon'. Both these studies describe the difficulty of coming to terms with not necessarily *feeling* intuitively like a mother during the early days, and discovering that it could take time to learn how to read and look after your child. In the UK, Miller (2005) identified that in later interviews, nine months in, 'some women who had previously spoken of their immediate, 'natural' identification with being mothers, now produced contradictory narratives of their experiences' (p.121). She proposes that these women were under intense pressure to live up to expectations and prove to themselves and others, not only that they were coping, but that motherhood was all rosy.

A second core aspect of intensive mothering ideology making it hard to resist, is the *morality* of 'good' mothering and its focus on *children's* needs. May (2008: p.471) proposes that in Western countries 'being a 'good' mother is particularly important for a successful and moral presentation of self and it is questionable whether a 'bad' mother (or a mother who could not show herself to be 'good') could claim a moral self'. She quotes Goffman (1971) on the important part morality and behaving to acceptable social norms play in being accepted within a social group (p.471/2). Giddens (1991) questions the concept of social norms in late modernity, with exposure to a multiplicity of social life-worlds and thus contradictions regarding what might and might not be morally right. However, this particular standard of morality appears to be consistently upheld. Wallbank (2001: p.143) argues in her book exploring and challenging legal and social discourses of motherhood, that:

...mothers construct and negotiate their own selfhood according to behaviour deemed appropriate to meeting the needs of their children. The duty of mothers to care for their children is articulated through a discourse of realizing and meeting their children's needs. Within these discourses, a woman's own needs remain unattended to.

This sense of moral obligation to 'be there' in person to care for their child is deeply gendered (Duncan et al, 2003). There is no such expectation for fathers – in contrast, the 'provider' role remains central to paternal identity (for example, Braun et al., 2011 - see section 1.3).

Feminists have been challenging essentialist notions of motherhood for decades. Chodorow (1978) drew on psychoanalytic object relations theory to critique theories that emphasized the essentialist nature of the relations between mother and child. She linked exclusive mothering by women of male children with perpetuating the dominance of patriarchy, by suggesting boys come to associate selfless qualities of nurturing as feminine, and seek to disassociate from and denigrate these qualities in order to define a separate, masculine self. She called for dual parenting, proposing that boys and girls would then accept nurturing as a parental quality, rather than specifically feminine. The concept of 'roles' was highly contested by second wave feminists who drew attention to power relations within couples and the way in which the social construction of gendered 'roles' maintained the subordination of women, by keeping them in the home (Friedan, 1963, Oakley, 1972). However, whilst feminist activism has played its part in encouraging more women out to work, and in gaining greater acceptance of working women, 'such challenges have not radically changed the dominant ideologies that powerfully and pervasively surround and shape motherhood' (Miller, 2005: p.56).

Indeed, it appears that the 'intensity' of mothering has strengthened over recent decades as more mothers have entered employment (Hays, 1996, Johnston and Swanson, 2006). Whilst Chodorow's (1978) theory might explain the perpetuation of gendered relationships of care, it does not explain this intensification. It has been suggested that Foucault's (1978) theory that 'cultural hegemony is perpetuated by setting up for failure those who attempt to counter hegemonic forces' (Johnston and Swanson, 2006: p.510) may partly explain this phenomenon. Miller (2005: p.56) suggests that the prominence of pro-family ideologies in the political arena both in the US and the UK, has acted to reinforce the importance and exclusivity of the role of 'mother' in attending to her children's needs. 'Pro-family' has been associated with conservative views and a backlash to the disintegration of moral values attributed by this group to liberalisation (Gillies, 2003). Out of this there emerged a current of pro-family 'feminism' that idealises motherhood and emphasises the sacred bond between mother and child (see Stacey, 1986). However, family values and the nuclear family remained a focus for New Labour, with a shift to moral tolerance but twinned with an emphasis on personal obligation (Gillies, 2003). Delphy (1992) described (and criticised) a tendency in liberal, mainstream feminism to defer to women's specificity and the taken-for-granted assumption that, alongside 'equal' rights, 'it is both 'good' (for women) and 'the right' of women to own children' (p.13).

At the same time, however, the idea of 'staying at home' as a full-time mother is also devalued, despite the middle-class, stay-at-home mother being core to the 1950's roots of intensive mothering. Mothers are therefore faced with contradictory discourses of the meaning and worth of mothering.

On the one hand mothers are ascribed an almost holy status, providing some recognition of their contribution, but locking them into expectations of extreme self-sacrifice. On the other hand, their work is considered nonwork, is not economically rewarded and is not generally respected (Vincent et al., 2004: p.573).

Crittenden (2001: p.45-64) in 'The Price of Motherhood: why the most important job in the world is still the least valued' traces the history of how mothers' work at home was 'disappeared'. She describes how in the early 1900's feminists were striving for an equal share of family wealth and income, based on an argument for revaluing mothers' worth. This was against a major shift in perceptions of a wife from an asset to a dependent. The notion of an equal share of income, however, proved too radical and suffrage became the focus of women's activism. In Crittenden's analysis, the ensuing focus on paid work as the only road to emancipation has in fact contributed to the devaluation of motherhood.

1.2.2 Significance of identity transformation

It has been suggested that women are 'allocated social roles in relation to their actual, potential or non-maternity' (Gatrell, 2008: p.6). Whether or not they are a mother, 'motherhood' will form an important part of how they are defined by others (Miller, 2005). Bailey (1999: p.351), drawing on interviews with mothers-to-be, argues that the transition to motherhood is 'a narrative pivot in the construction of a reflexive biography'. She suggests that during this period of self-reflection, women are 'excused' from certain aspects of their former selves that can result in a sense of relief and escape, but also for some, of shame and failure. Rather than a rupture, she proposes the women were experiencing a sense of 'refraction' – 'pregnancy was taking them into an altered world, and hence affected their awareness of different aspects of themselves' (p.350). Whilst acknowledging pregnancy as an exceptional state, she also stresses that it is one that most mothers (and indeed most women) go through.

Studies in a Western context tend to suggest that becoming a mother results in a major disruption to a woman's identity (Golden, 2001, Johnston and Swanson, 2007, Miller, 2005). The sudden transformation from 'pregnant woman' to 'mother' is often described as being hugely disorientating and overwhelming, despite being anticipated. As discussed (1.2.1), adopting this new identity can take time to come to terms with, and this can be at odds with expecting that this will come 'naturally' (Lupton, 2000, Miller, 2005). Literature refers to the shock of appreciating the enormity of the responsibility as mother (Lupton, 2000), and this, coupled with the all-consuming demands of mothering a new infant, can result in a sense of losing control of one's former identity, of it being subsumed (Lupton, 2000, Miller, 2005). Concurrently, becoming a mother is described as a deeply fulfilling and enriching experience and the depth of feeling can also be described as a shock, whether or not 'natural' love was anticipated (Bailey, 1999, Lupton, 2000, Miller, 2005).

1.2.3 Motherhood identities: class distinctions

Authors tend to agree that child-centeredness is core to perceptions of 'good' mothering for *all* women in contemporary Western cultures (Hays, 1996, Johnston and Swanson, 2006, Vincent et al., 2004). However, beyond a shared adherence to child-centeredness, the literature that follows indicates distinctions in identity construction and understanding of what constitutes 'good' mothering, driven by the different social conditions and discourses mothers are experiencing. Whilst Hays (1996) has acknowledged some differences in practices, her central argument is that women of all classes and social backgrounds in mainstream Western culture 'share a set of fundamental assumptions about the importance of putting their children's needs first and

dedicating themselves to providing what is best for their kids, as they understand it' (p.86). She stresses that although mothers may 'reshape' this ideology, they:

... do not erase the cultural contradictions of motherhood. All the mothers I spoke to feel the pressure to live up to the image of a good mother, all of them recognize the central tenets of intensive mothering, and none would seek to transform that ideology in the name of a competitive pursuit of personal gain (p.95).

Hays' contention that at a *fundamental* level *all* women are acknowledging 'intensive mothering' and are thus contradicting the arguably even more dominant ideology of the rationalised market is convincingly argued and has been much cited (Hattery, 2001, Johnston and Swanson, 2006). However, an over-emphasis on fundamental similarities at a theoretical level can hide or downplay differences derived from lived experience, falling into the trap of *judging* all mothers by these predominantly white, middle-class standards.

Theories of individualisation (Beck, 1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, Giddens, 1991) have claimed that the significance of personal agency in managing one's life and producing one's biography has resulted in the demise of class identities. Recently, however, there has been a renaissance in the relevance of class, lead by feminist sociologists (see Gillies, 2006). Academics researching mothering and child-raising have argued that working-class mothers, particularly working-class lone mothers, appear to be especially vulnerable to being judged as not good enough or bad mothers (Gillies, 2005, Vincent et al., 2010, Wallbank, 2001).

Hays (1996) maintains that being expert-guided is a core part of the logic of intensive mothering for *all* mothers. She argues that there is a close match between advice handed out by experts in manuals, and what mothers say about 'good' mothering. Hence, the 'advice' available through word of mouth is, she argues, expert-guided. However, Bailey (2000) contends that the 'professionalisation' of motherhood tends to refer to middle-class practices. This is where mothers (especially mothers-to-be and new mothers) draw on their professional skills to research for and organise their mothering. Drawing on Bourdieu (1979), she refers to this as drawing on 'class-specific habitus' (p.65).

Others (Gillies, 2005, 2006, Vincent et al., 2010) similarly argue that these 'professional' skills and expert guidance are focused on middle-class values and aspirations about child rearing. They point to class distinctions in parenting practices driven by different priorities regarding what is 'best' for their children, deriving from different social circumstances and constraints. For example, the emphasis placed by middle-class mothers on their children attending creative, musical and sporting activities – starting

during the pre-school phase (Vincent and Ball, 2007). In contrast to these paid-for enrichment activities, Vincent et al (2010) note that their working-class sample of mothers tend to refer simply to outings to the local park. Skeggs (2004) proposes that value lies at the core of the middle-class identity. Value does not always refer to economic value and gain. Here it is referring to Lareau's (2002) concept of 'concerted cultivation' whereby a mother focuses her efforts on cultivating her children's cognitive and social skills, in contrast to the 'natural growth' approach describing working-class mothering.

Much of this literature argues that contemporary, parenting discourses (and particularly mothering discourses) legitimate middle-class parenting practices whilst pathologising those of the working class. However, Perrier (2012: p.4), in a recent study with middle-class mothers of young children, argues that it is important to go beyond seeing middle-class parents as just 'capital-bearing and transmitting individuals' as this:

...misses out the complexity and messiness of how privileged mothers negotiate these discourses. I found that even though concerted cultivation and intensive parenting are legitimated as 'good' parenting, these discourses have uneven effects on middle-class mothers' moral identities.

She suggested that her participants were 'cautiously negotiating the boundaries of good motherhood'. They sometimes 'othered' working-class women by linking their parenting to 'conspicuous consumption' (p.8) and positioning this as in-adequate, compared to spending quality time with their children. But she also referred to them often resisting the 'spectre of the 'pushy' strategic middle-class mother' (p.4). She stresses the importance of taking into account contradictions and ambiguities, citing Reay's (2000) concept of 'emotional capital' (Perrier, 2012, p.5) as important, illustrating how a mother's over-emphasis on her children's education might simultaneously impact positively on their cultural capital whilst compromising their emotional wellbeing. She critiqued the emphasis on accumulation in applying Bourdieu's concept of 'capital', a popular framework for exploring class in the field of parenting young children and education, arguing this could miss contradiction in maternal moralities of middle-class mothers (see also Duncan, 2005, for a similar critique on the application of Bourdieu).

In Lareau's (2002) ethnographic study of child rearing in US families, social class was found to have a greater impact than 'race' in influencing key aspects of family life and mothering, including how children use their time, the use of discipline and the nature of the families' connections. However, ethnicity and cultural background/ locality also influence a woman's perspective on mothering and how she constructs her mother identity (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). Elsewhere, distinctions in the construction of

mother identity are highlighted when examined in the context of division of family work and combining motherhood and work, as the following sections will illustrate.

1.3 Gendered relationships of care

There is considerable debate on the continued unequal division of family work (child-care and domestic work) between mothers and fathers. Academics have referred to the slowness of change in this respect (Hochschild, 1990, Beagan et al., 2008). Prevalent egalitarian discourses appear to be at odds with findings that repeatedly show that mothers take on the lion's share of family work. The following sections explore the gendered nature of the division of family work, in particular focusing on the relationship between conceptions of equity, fairness and choice and subsequent impact on identity. Key to this discussion is appreciating the identities and practices of men as fathers and partners, whether and if so how these are changing, and the consequences for mothering and mother identity.

1.3.1 Continuing unequal division of labour

The literature tends to concur that the division of family work is unequal. For example, analysis of the British Household Panel Survey data for 2003/4 (Harkness, 2008) indicated that the additional hours of domestic labour⁴ associated with the presence of children in the household are taken up almost entirely by the female partner. According to this research, fathers do a smaller proportion of the overall unpaid domestic work than men in childless partnerships. Overall, mothers are contributing close to two-fifths of paid working hours, and three-quarters of unpaid working hours. Even in dual-earning couples, where mothers are contributing around 46% of paid working hours, they are still doing 70% of unpaid hours. Regarding mostly taking on tasks themselves, Harkness found the only significant difference between part-time working and stay-at-home mothers to be the proportion taking primary responsibility for childcare (69% of part-time working mothers; 81.5% of stay-at-home mothers: p.254). Other studies have made use of Time Use Surveys to look at division of actual hours spent in domestic labour (Bianchi et al., 2000, Sullivan, 2006) and childcare (Craig, 2006) – invariably indicating wide discrepancies between men and women, even when both are working similar hours.

In early motherhood, women often report feeling it is only 'fair' that they take on the bulk of childcare and domestic work, as they are the ones at home (Lupton, 2000, Miller, 2005). Whilst this new arrangement might be the source of some resentment (some women

⁴ This is defined here as including 'responsibility for childcare' and 'nursing sick child', but not childcare itself.

reported that partners did more to help pre-children), this time availability rationale is used consistently. Research has indicated that fathers of young children spend slightly more hours in paid work than before children (Houston and Marks, 2005). It has been suggested that this may be financially driven if their partners have cut back hours or stopped working, or it may be the added sense of responsibility to provide. However, this time allocation rationale continues to be used when mothers have returned to work, and can still be described as 'fair'.

Often rationalising the unequal division of labour as 'fair' does not mean women are necessarily content with this state of affairs. To the contrary, research has highlighted this as a source of resentment and conflict within relationships (Crompton and Lyonette, 2006, Hochschild, 1990). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) propose that conflict around division of labour relates to the significance this holds for both women and men's identities. The meaning attached to the tasks involved is gendered, as will become apparent – and how the tasks are divided therefore impacts on one's sense of identity as a woman or a man. Harkness (2008) has referred to 'notions of identity' in attempting to explain the counter-intuitive finding that women tend to increase their hours of domestic labour if their earnings rise significantly above their partner's.

Hochschild (1990) identified that a mismatch of marital ideologies could result in tension. She also reported that tension arose when ideologies did not appear to match experience or feelings. However, she suggested that there was evidence in her research that sharing the 'second shift' improves a marital relationship regardless of the ideas either partner has about men and women's roles. She identified three types of marital role ideology: traditional, transitional and egalitarian. Most of her respondents were 'transitional', with transitional women proposing that their partner should base his identity more on work than she does, and transitional men supporting the idea of their partner working but expecting her to take on the main responsibility for home. Referring to this ideology as 'transitional' reflects Hochschild's expectation that as more women took on paid work, there would be a shift at home towards a more 'egalitarian' division of work. Indeed, 'equality' feminism has called for dual-caring as a necessary component of a dual-earning society (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). Over two decades on and little appears to have changed regarding division of family labour. Both men and women generally continue to prioritise the male partner's work and place primary responsibility for the home on the female partner. This is found in literature on mothering (Duncan et al., 2003, Hays, 1996, Johnston and Swanson, 2006) and on fathering (Braun et al., 2011, Craig, 2006, Wall and Arnold, 2007, Williams, 2008). The dominance of intensive mothering to female identity

(see 1.2.1) and of provision to male identity appears to be an important factor in this 'unequal yet fair' division of family work.

Duncan et al. (2003) examine 'gendered moral rationalities' in mothers accounting for how their mothering is combined with paid work (see next section 1.4) and how time and labour are allocated with their partners – extending their earlier work with lone mothers (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). They distinguished between mothers' value systems informing understandings of division of labour that suggested 'pre-given roles' and 'negotiation about practical tasks'. The 'gendered moral rationalities' underpinning these value systems differed. 'Pre-given' rationalities included understandings of gender roles that were essentialist (biological and psychological), as well as views concerning gender that could be cultural, religious or political. The 'negotiation' rationalities were often about trading time and tasks, but by linking these with views of gender preferences or suitability for certain tasks these could sometimes approach a 'pre-given role'. This was the modal value position for White mothers with male partners. Both tended to result in unequal division of tasks, rather than sharing. The research included White lesbian mothers and White 'alternative'⁵ mothers, but even amongst these groups and despite emphasising a value-system based on 'togetherness', allocation often followed 'conventional' rationalities stressing trading or even pre-given biological or political roles. The findings suggested that a *shared* allocation of tasks was only found where this was driven by an overt political position on gender equality. This was most common amongst White middle-class respondents. Whilst overall the authors felt that 'moral negotiation' was a stronger contender in accounting for the findings than either theories of individualisation or new household economics, they questioned whether this could account for some mothers adhering to notions of 'pre-given roles'.

Empirical research exploring masculinities has illustrated a lack of coupling between egalitarian values and masculinities (Connell, 1995, Riley, 2003). Some authors have suggested, however, that young males are showing signs of rejecting hegemonic or 'orthodox' masculinity for a more egalitarian form of masculinity, incorporating 'metrosexual' behaviour (Adams et al., 2010, Anderson, 2009). It has also been suggested that young women today assume equality and emphasize individual 'choice' in its place (Everingham et al., 2007). It is interesting to note, however, that amongst 18-34's, parents are somewhat more traditional regarding women working and gender relations than those who are childless (Dench, 2009). This indicates that it is perhaps in *experiencing*

⁵ Defined as advocating and attempting to practise feminist and/or green/anti-capitalist lifestyles.

fatherhood within a partnership that the lack of coupling between egalitarian values and masculinities comes to the fore.

1.3.2 'Sharing' child-care

In the literature on fatherhood, being a 'good' father is predominantly defined through providing for his family, without the need to necessarily spend physical time with the family (Braun et al., 2011, Vincent and Ball, 2006). Such an emphasis means that whilst fathering *can* be 'active' or more 'involved', Braun et al's 'background' fathers 'may fall short of a social ideal of equal parenting, (but) they neither experience substantial outside pressure to change, nor are they compelled to question their masculinity because of their fathering behaviour' (2011: p.9).

Whilst breadwinning remains central to male and fatherhood identities, and research continues to find no serious challenge to traditional gendered divisions of family labour (Braun et al., 2011, Vincent and Ball, 2006), there are indications that what it means to be a father is undergoing social change (Williams, 2008). This has led to a growing academic focus on fatherhood (Braun et al., 2011, Doucet, 2006, Gregory and Milner, 2011a, Williams, 2008). Popular and policy discourses suggest that paternal involvement in child rearing is beneficial for a child's emotional and developmental wellbeing and there has been much reference to more involved fathering and the resulting potential issue of absent fathers (May, 2008, VanEvery, 1995, Wallbank, 2001). The literature is not, however, clear-cut in its conclusions on the extent and nature of this apparent social change.

The extent and ways in which childcare is shared in Australia were explored by Craig (2006), applying layered analysis to a time-use survey. She identifies that whilst fathers are spending more time on childcare than in the past, mothers are too, so the difference is little affected. Her findings regarding the composition of childcare 'sharing' suggested that 'the conditions of childcare appear to be harder for mothers: mothering involves more double activity, more physical labor, a more rigid timetable and more overall responsibility than fathering' (p.276). In contrast, 'the child care tasks in which men mostly engage are arguably the more fun ones, which implies that paternal time with children is less like work than maternal time' (p.275). Other research has similarly pointed to such gendered distinctions in the tasks undertaken and the weight of assumed responsibility (Braun et al., 2011, Hays, 1996, Miller, 2005).

An interesting perspective on responsibility and masculinities is found in Doucet's (2004b, 2004a, 2006, 2009, 2011) work on fathering, since the majority of Canadian fathers in her research were primary caregivers. In 'Do men mother?' (2006), she defines mothering as

taking *responsibility* for children, and explores fathers in relation to emotional, community and moral responsibility. Overall her findings suggest that gendered notions of mothering and fathering persist even when the father is the primary caregiver. Whilst fathers can and do take on day-to-day caring when mothers are absent, she finds dominant paternal patterns in the practice of care – for example, emphasis on masculine qualities such as physical, outdoor play and encouraging independence and risk-taking (see also Doucet, 2004a). She suggests mothers generally maintain control of community responsibility (defined as the extra-domestic organising). She puts this down in part to fathers being excluded from the social networks of mothers in which much of this organising takes place, and in part to mothers' maintaining a gatekeeping role (see also Miller, 2005). Regarding moral responsibility and what it means to be a 'good' father or mother, she finds distinctions in beliefs are deeply imbedded - directing one back once again to a father's primary responsibility being to provide for his family and a mother's to care.

Despite talk of egalitarian parenting, there still appear to be aspects of parenting that tend to be considered more 'natural' or socially or morally appropriate for mothers to do (see also section 1.2.1). References to 'egalitarian discourses on parenting' have been made in the preceding discussion. However, it is argued that the widespread use of the gender-neutral term 'parenting' in public and policy discourse is superficial and that under the surface, expectations are in fact clearly gendered. Flexible working policy, for example, refers gender-neutrally to 'parents', whilst the expectation is that it will almost always be mothers who will actually take this up (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). Studies of media portrayal of parents have suggested that under the heading of 'parenting', mothers continue to be positioned, represented and addressed as the primary parent and fathers as the secondary, part-time parent (Sunderland, 2006, Wall and Arnold, 2007). Wall and Arnold (2007: p.523) conclude that 'the culture of fatherhood reflected here is not one that seriously challenges individual fathers to spend more time caring for young children or one that provides much support to those who wish to be fully involved in caring for their children'. Helping with care-giving tasks is presented as 'admirable', rather than expected (p.522); stay-at-home dads are a novelty, different from the norm (p.520).

It seems that fathers are generally more involved in childcare than their fathers were. Williams (2008) refers to the fathers in his research often criticising their own fathers lack of involvement, although they did not see their way of fathering as a 'new' approach and were somewhat unclear of what it meant to be 'involved'. According to this analysis, the traditional provider role remains central to fathering, but at the same time fathering is increasingly driven by circumstances (such as their partner working full-time), rather than choices (see also Braun et al., 2011).

1.3.3 'Sharing' domestic work

Beagan et al (2008) explored perceptions of fairness regarding division of labour amongst family members of three ethno-cultural groups in Canada. Concentrating on food work, they found that whilst it was almost always mothers taking on primary responsibility, no family members seemed to think this unfair. Punjabi families explained differences by directly engaging with traditional gender roles. European Canadian women instead rationalised the distinctions in a number of ways, including time allocation, family health and family harmony. The authors argue convincingly that unspoken gender expectations 'appeared to be operating just under the surface' (p.667/8). In concluding they state:

For decades, scholarship in the area of domestic labour has assumed gender inequities will diminish over time, yet this does not appear to be happening. Rather, traditional gender roles seem to reinvent themselves in new guises. While it is no longer acceptable in many sociocultural groups to assume domestic work is inherently women's work, the same gender expectations persist in more complex forms, couched in terms of individual choices, standards and preferences (p.668).

Gender construction theory proposes that 'many women view the performance of domestic labour as both a demonstration of their love and concern for family members and a crucial means of identity construction' (Erickson, 2005: p.340). It is argued that women are more likely to attach such expressive meaning to family work due to femininity's conceptualisation as caring and connected to others (Erickson, 2005). This resonates with Baxter's (2000) research findings pointing to it being a male partner's participation in traditionally feminine tasks, rather than time spent on tasks that influence perceptions of fairness – for men as well as women. Men's participation is not just about relieving women of some of the boring or arduous task. It has symbolic relevance.

Similar to 'sharing' childcare, 'sharing' domestic work is framed within the context of the mother generally taking more primary *responsibility* for tasks, and the father generally being in a *supportive* role, helping out when he can (Beagan et al, 2008). Within this framework, fathers feel they *are* helping out in the home, certainly more so than their fathers did, but do not feel obliged to do more on the basis of either their masculinity or their fatherhood (Riley, 2003). It has been observed that 'coercing men and children to do more may lead to more unhappiness and greater levels of stress and dissatisfaction' (Baxter, 2000: p.611). Beagan et al's (2008) telling title 'It's just easier if I do it' also refers to women taking on tasks in part to keep family harmony. The effort and time required for 'emotion work' in families has often been overlooked – as has seemingly the potential significance of this with regards to division of family work (Erickson, 2005).

1.4 Reconciling motherhood with paid work

This section turns to the reconciliation of motherhood with work, where there is a large body of literature. The focus here is the early phase of reconciliation, coming to some decision as to how to combine motherhood and work (or not), and in particular, identity construction during this phase. This includes a critical assessment of Hakim's (2004) Preference Theory, illustrating the problematic nature of the theorising by drawing out the web of contradictions, competing pulls and constraints mothers have to face – and the significant ideological work required in reconciling mothering and working. In this scenario, it seems that 'choice' entails justification with implications for mother identities. With the emphasis on identity construction, this section concludes with a critical look at the ways in which mother-worker identities are conceptualised.

1.4.1 'Choosing' work-home status: Hakim's Preference Theory

The standard rationale for the status quo is that women choose to have children, and in so doing, choose to accept the trade-offs that have always ensued (Crittenden, 2001: p.10).

If you are a mother, you must be an intensive one. The only 'choice' involved is whether you add the role of paid working woman (Hays, 1996: p.131).

The concept of 'choice' is highly problematic in the context of motherhood and work. Hakim's (2004) Preference Theory, in which she proposes that women are heterogeneous with regards to their work-life 'choices', has been fiercely debated and contested. According to Hakim's analysis, around one-fifth of women are home-centred, one-fifth are 'careerists', and the remaining three-fifths majority are described as 'adaptives'. She proposes that part-time work is popular in countries like the UK, where flexible, de-regulated labour markets make this possible, because many women 'choose' to prioritise their family lives. She argues that seeking less demanding part-time jobs is partly a result of rationally analysing what will be best overall for the family, indicating some approval for Becker's (1991) New Home Economics Theory. Giddens (2004) supported this Preference Theory as an interesting new perspective, based on his reading of it meshing with his views on 'life politics' and the individual's role and choice in self-identity construction. Authors such as Rosemary Crompton (1997, 2005, 2006, 2008) have criticised the theory as gender essentialist, and provided evidence of structural and economic constraints that question equating decisions regarding work-home status with preferences.

Longitudinal studies are useful references for investigating intentions and expectations with regards to combining working and mothering (Houston and Marks, 2005, McRae, 2003). These studies indicate that many women do not end up doing what they would have chosen and their work-home settlement does not necessarily match an orientation towards mothering or working. For example, Houston and Marks' (2005) found that some women seemed to have withdrawn from working to preserve rather than compromise their professional identity. Others remained childless, but not necessarily due to a strong career orientation. Some returned to full-time work, but then felt unable to maintain this when they had their second child, and cut back their hours to part-time. These, and other studies (Hattery, 2001, Hochschild, 1990, Johnston and Swanson, 2006) tend to agree that there may be a small proportion of women primarily oriented towards home, and a small proportion primarily oriented towards career. However, these women's 'choices' may still be constrained by structural or economic constraints, despite having less of an ideological contradiction to deal with. The majority appear to identify with both mothering and working, but Houston and Marks (2005) contest Hakim's (2000) notion that these 'adaptive' women are less committed to their worker/career identity. Based on their findings⁶ that there was no difference in non-financial commitment between those working full-time and part-time, they argue that 'by contrast [our findings] show what extraordinary effort women have to make in overcoming both psychological and practical constraints in order to work' (p.102).

1.4.2 Financial 'need' and 'Gendered Moral Rationalities'

Whilst there appears to be little support for neoclassical economic theory whereby women's 'choice' to participate is driven purely by economic need (Hattery, 2001), analyses have shown that women's financial contribution to the family is increasingly important, even if the work is part-time (Harkness et al., 1997). Johnston and Swanson (2007) have suggested that financial 'need' is relative and socially constructed. Whilst practically women in better off households are freer to 'choose' not to work, this study showed that middle-class, professional women may well feel a need to contribute financially and not be completely dependent – or they may describe as a 'need' a desired standard of living, or one they have been used to on a dual income pre- children. Equally, mothers from a less well-off background may still decide not to work or to work limited hours, despite the relative 'need' for the money, due to other practical, structural or ideological constraints. Their sample of 98 mothers with pre-school children covered

⁶ Based on a longitudinal study 1999-2003: 412 first-time pregnant women were surveyed and were re-contacted at their child's first, second and third birthdays (by which time there were 312). The majority earned £12-30,000, but twenty percent earned more and twenty percent less.

household income ranging from 17,000 to over 113,000 dollars. Their analysis of demographic variables suggested financial reasons for full-time employment were not related to household income.

Duncan and Edwards (1999) argued that their study with lone mothers demonstrated that 'gendered moral rationalities' override economic rationalities in decision-making regarding combining caring and working. They suggested that 'as socially patterned moral guidelines, they both constrain and facilitate certain courses of action for particular social groups of lone mothers' (p.142). These rationalities were explored further with groups of partnered mothers with a child under twelve, who differed along dimensions of class, ethnicity, conventionality, sexuality and geography (Duncan et al., 2003, Duncan, 2005). They refer to care not simply being a *constraint* to paid work - as a deeply felt *moral obligation*, mothers often *wished* to do so. This complicates the notion of 'choice', by suggesting that 'gendered moral rationalities' incorporate an element of agency, whilst simultaneously structuring decisions. The authors concluded that the presence of partners and mother's sexuality made little difference to the gendered moral rationalities - that is what was considered the 'right' way to combine work and mothering. This underlined the highly gendered nature of the moral rationalities and reinforced the authors' notion of a 'rationality mistake', inherent in the 'adult worker model' increasingly taking the place of the male breadwinner model in policy assumptions. This model 'implicitly assumes that people act as 'rational economic man' in taking individualistic, cost-benefit type decisions about how to maximize their own personal gain. Paid work is assumed to be the optimum means of doing this' (Duncan et al, 2003, p. 310).

In the study of partnered mothers (Duncan et al, 2003), middle-class, White mothers tended more towards the 'primarily worker' position, defined as giving primacy 'to paid work for themselves as separate to their identity as mothers' (p.313), whilst working-class, White mothers tended more towards the 'primarily mother' position, giving primacy 'to the benefits of physically caring for their children themselves' (p.313). However, many were positioned in-between, the authors noting surprise at the distinction not being greater, bearing in mind the 'stark' (p.316) differences in background, qualifications, jobs and income. In contrast, Black mothers tended towards a 'mother-worker integral' position, integrating provision as part of 'good' mothering (see also Collins, 1991). Duncan (2005) went on to explore mothering, class and rationality further, identifying intra-class distinctions between middle-class, White 'gentrifying partners' (tending more towards 'primarily worker') and 'suburban wives' (tending more towards 'primarily mother') (p.55). 'Suburban wives' are distinguished from 'gentrified partners' through, for example, looking for fulfilment in part-time work, where career identity was on hold or abandoned,

and through constructing this and their locality (suburbia) as 'part and parcel of conventional – that is strongly gendered – family building' (p.69). He concluded that despite similar class positions, educational attainment and careers before motherhood, the distinctions were not simply life-style 'choices' as Hakim's classless, individualised Preference Theory would propose. Rather, they pointed to more nuanced social identities, socially and culturally created through different mixes of choice and constraint, relating to career identity, biographical experience, relations with partners and normative views within their social networks.

McDowell et al. (2005) investigated decisions influencing caring responsibilities amongst women with a pre-school child. Concurring with Duncan et al., they concluded that there were multiple influences including class position, gender inequalities in the labour market, differing capacities to pay for childcare, and complex 'gendered moral rationalities' relating to care responsibilities. They similarly critiqued Hakim's Preference Theory, calling instead for a more *situated* understanding of women's negotiation of moralities and identities. By examining narratives of mothering and caring strategies and using four accounts as illustrations, they highlighted not just the complexity of inter-related factors involved, but also the fluidity of understandings of 'appropriate' care and how reported decisions were amenable to change in altered circumstances. They proposed that 'for most women, the decision is neither a clear-cut nor a constant one' (p.231).

Johnson and Swanson (2007) noted that the influence of work/career *identity* on decision-making in combining work and caring during the early years is often neglected. Where it is included, it tends to be defined simply in terms of non-financial commitment (whether they would work regardless of financial 'need') and/or the importance of work/career as a separate identity. Studies have indicated that those 'choosing' part-time working may still be highly committed to work per se (Houston and Marks, 2005, Johnson and Swanson, 2007). However, they are often positioned in the middle of a worker/mother dichotomy – where labels such as 'adaptives' (Hakim, 2004) and 'pragmatist' (Hattery, 2001) indicate a weaker commitment to work/career – or towards 'mother' if prioritising children and accepting job compromise are included in rationales.

This thesis will come on to question this notion that those 'choosing' part-time do so simply due to a weak commitment to work/career. It will cast a spotlight on the inference that for many women, particularly those working part-time, careers are often 'on hold' (Vincent et al., 2004) during the early phase of mothering. In doing so, it will examine the potential significance of this to decision-making and identity construction. Ch.2 will attempt to engage more deeply with the complexities of work and career identities as

discussed in organisational literature and framed by theories being debated within the sociology of work. This will include a focus on part-time working, providing an alternative perspective on the particular constraints of part-time working in relation to 'career' and the 'ideal' worker. I will come on to argue that lacking a career plan (one of the attributes used by Duncan et al, 2003 for 'career identity'), for example, may be due to unforeseen compromises to make part-time work fit, rather than a 'weak' commitment to career.

1.4.3 Contradictory public discourses and policy

There has been considerable focus in research and policy-making on childcare costs as a barrier to work for some and the lack of good quality, affordable childcare (Houston and Marks, 2005, McDowell et al., 2005, Vincent and Ball, 2006). This has led to, for example, the introduction in 2010 of 15 term-time hours per week of free child-care for all 3 and 4 year olds in England (Department for Education, 2014). The participants in this research (youngest at secondary school) would have missed this, and may have been less constrained regarding child-care costs than many, but may have encountered issues with finding good, quality, affordable childcare. Policy discourses and measures around Welfare to Work and the New Deal for lone mothers are considered to have had an impact on attitudes and behaviour (Millar, 2008). The principle message of working and providing for your family being 'good for you' (Millar, 2008) and 'a positive and definitive aspect of every adult's life' (Braun et al., 2008: p.539) are considered to have been absorbed to some extent. Whilst again, the participants in this research were unlikely to have been recipients (being recruited as University-educated, partnered and in part-time employment), these discourses may have had an impact.

However, concurrently, policy discourse has emphasized the importance of family, and within this, the importance of parenting regarding children's development and behaviour. Whilst public discourses use the supposedly gender-neutral term 'parenting', some academics argue that since mothers are almost always in practice the principle carers, 'parenting' can usually be substituted by 'mothering' (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005, Sunderland, 2006). Thus, they propose, it is mothers who worry about the impact of their working on their children's development and/or behaviour, not fathers. The impact of non-maternal care during the pre-school years on early child development and later consequences has attracted considerable academic and government attention (Gregg et al., 2005). Similarly, so has the impact of a mother working on family life, in particular, the potential negative impact of stress and conflict. Overall, UK research on the impact on young children on cognitive development and anti-social behaviour remains somewhat inconclusive but appears modest, at worst (Gregg et al., 2005, Layard and Dunn, 2009,

Sammons et al., 2004, Sammons et al., 2007). Nonetheless, studies investigating attitudes to women working continue to report concerns regarding the effect of mothers working on family life and children (Crompton and Lyonette, 2008, Scott, 2008). The media may be encouraging such concerns by highlighting them (Vincent et al., 2010). It is suggested that these perceptions act as a constraint for some and a source of guilt and worry for others, and are a major factor in the recently stalling and inconsistent changes in attitudes to traditional gender 'roles' and women working (Scott, 2008).

1.4.4 Competing pulls on time

The concept of time features heavily in discussions on combining working and mothering – with 'being there' being central to the demands of both and time available finite. Particularly during the early phase of reconciling the two, it appears that finding ways of *managing* time for both is crucial, but often extremely difficult to do (Crompton and Lyonette, 2008, Houston and Marks, 2005, Johnston and Swanson, 2007). Studies reference women compromising on status, pay, and interest of their work in order to 'fit' work with looking after children (Johnston and Swanson, 2006, Vincent et al., 2010). There are qualitative distinctions in time pressures between those in high level jobs, where the pressure is focused on the expectation of total commitment, and those in low waged jobs, where many need to work multiple jobs or over-time and are less able to 'buy back time' by paying for cleaning or childcare (Warren, 2010). Time pressures are not just about having enough time, but having time at the point that you need it (Reisch, 2001). Being able to negotiate time and have control over where and when work takes place are important factors in alleviating time pressures (Warren, 2010). As section 1.3 examined, research consistently shows that mothers take on the lion's share of work at home, also referred to as the 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1990). A partner's capacity and willingness to share this work inevitably constrains or supports a mother working.

Hochschild's (1997) 'Time Bind' proposed that longer workweeks were now preferred by many in the US, in preference to the stressful, un-stimulating and isolating demands of time at home. Jacobs and Gerson's (2004) 'The Time Divide' contests this, arguing that most people are trying to combine or integrate these two commitments, rather than avoid one of them. There is a body of literature on time poverty resulting from a long hours work culture, arguing that this exacerbates the issue of finding time for family (see for example Warren, 2010 for a discussion on this). Literature also explores work-family conflict arising from parents, and particularly mothers, being overwhelmed by the demands of the two 'greedy institutions' of work and home (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004).

Acknowledging these intense time pressures, the right to ask for flexible working was introduced – in the first instance, for parents of children under 6, following research that indicated that demand for flexible working was greater, the younger the child (Work and Parents Taskforce, 2001). This was extended to parents of children under 17⁷ in 2009, following a review indicating that there is still considerable demand for flexible working with older children (Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, 2008). However, the type of work, job role, seniority, organisational culture, and other factors, including gender, appear to impact on the feasibility of flexible working being an option – effecting likelihood of requesting flexibility (for example, not asking out of fear of discrimination) and approval of such a request if it is deemed bad for business (see 2.4).

1.4.5 Justifying work-home ‘choice’: prevalence of ‘othering’

As a result of mothers being ‘simultaneously vilified and revered’ (Wallbank, 2001: p.2), the coexistence of ‘supermom’ and ‘traditional mom’ ‘represents a serious cultural ambivalence about how mothers should behave’ (Hays, 1996: p.132). Hays argues that her research suggests that the so-called ‘mommy wars’ between the two ‘ideals’ are exaggerated and superficial. According to her, these mothers show respect for each other, not least because both groups are attempting to adhere to the same intensive mothering expectations. But, both being in ‘no-win’ situations, they require ‘socially necessary ideological work’ (p.133) to make sense of their position, resulting in ‘othering’ as part of the justification. This simultaneous respect and denigration with regards to *other* mothers is illustrated frequently in the literature (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004, Johnston and Swanson, 2006, Sigala, 2005). Respect is often couched in being an individual choice and denigration in suggesting that ‘I’m not the kind of mother/person who...’.

‘Intensive mothering’ (Hays, 1996) was discussed in 1.2.1. The purpose of returning to it now, is to understand how mothers identify with this discourse, from the perspectives of different work statuses. Johnston and Swanson (2006) analysed how stay-at-home mothers, part-time working mothers and full-time working mothers constructed their mother identity differently in relation to three discursive spheres of intensive mothering expectations. These positions had been identified in mothering research in Sweden (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson, 2001). They were ‘accessibility’ of the mother for the child (considered a requirement for the child’s development and wellbeing), ‘happy mother = happy child’ (suggesting mothers need to find contentment outside their lives as mothers), and ‘separate spheres’ (indicating that both work and motherhood are valued as separate identities).

⁷ The Flexible Working (Eligibility, Complaints and Remedies) (Amendment) Regulations 2009.

Johnston and Swanson (2006) suggested that in constructing their mother identity against these positions, their participants were justifying their settlement, even if not completely happy with it, and in the process were perhaps inevitably taking part in 'othering'. For example, part-time working mothers constructed 'accessibility' by emphasising quality (periodic) time, but this fell short in the eyes of stay-at-home mothers. Both part-time and full-time working mothers agreed that mothers should have an identity outside being a mother, and since this was primarily assumed to be a worker/career identity, this excluded stay-at-home mothers (p.515). Part-time working mothers were better able to embrace the associated happy mother = happy child position, for example by stressing that having breaks from their children made them more patient with them. But they referred to full-time working mothers missing out by not spending 'enough' time with their children. Indeed, full-time working mothers themselves make this distinction and are identified as being 'less happy' as a result. Johnston and Swanson (2006: p.517) conclude that 'in light of Therborn's (1980) definition of ideology – *what exists, what is, and what is possible* – we found that mothers are ironically constructing their mothering identity in ways that *constrain* their range of choices'.

It also seems that mothers may feel required to justify their work-home status in relation to their own mothers. In a separate analysis, based on the same sample of 98 mothers of pre-school children, Johnston and Swanson (2008) found that if a woman adopted a different employment status to her mother, they tended to separate their mothering from the mothering they had received. For example, in some cases full-time mothers were found to criticise their own stay-at-home mothers for being stifling and over-protective and in other cases, for being detached and unavailable. At least half of their sample were mothering in a different way to which they had been mothered. There was an awareness of a generational shift in mothering expectations, but nonetheless, women were reflecting on their mother's mother-worker identity and justifying any differences.

1.4.6 Conceptualising the relationship between mother and worker identities

Research conducted amongst different generational cohorts of women points to a significant shift in perceptions of the relationship between mother and worker identities over time (Blair-Loy, 2001, Everingham et al., 2007). Specifically, it suggests that women who came of age before second-wave feminism were much more likely to perceive 'mother' and 'worker' identities as dichotomous, and thus more likely to separate the identities. This could be by sequencing working (until they had children), and mothering (assumed as the norm rather than 'selected'), and potentially returning to working when the children were ready or off their hands (but not necessarily in a planned way). Or, in

the case of a significant proportion of Blair-Loy's (2001) high-flying finance executives, by selecting career over motherhood and remaining childless (assuming that they could not do both). In contrast, these studies found that younger generations, coming of age after second-wave feminism, were entering adulthood assuming that they could be both a mother and a worker. Everingham (2007: p.427) suggests that in the younger generation identity formation is characterized by the emergence of 'mother/worker' whereby these two identities are understood as being 'enmeshed', rather than separate.

During early mothering, it appears that 'mother' identity tends to dominate. New mothers are usually at home at least for the first few months, and are physically and often emotionally absorbed in mothering and establishing this new mother identity (Hays, 1996, Lupton, 2000, Miller, 2005). As section 1.2.1 illustrated, the initial decision regarding work-home status is a complex settlement of competing pulls, constraints and incentives. Mothers of young children may also be managing an unsatisfactory settlement involving compromise and a requirement to justify the settlement – both will be impacting on her sense of self and wellbeing.

Much of the research conducted on new mothers and mothers with pre-school children refers to the power of intensive mothering ideology and importance to the sense of self of being a 'good' mother (Hays, 1996, Lupton, 2000, Miller, 2005). Hattery (2001) uses mothering ideology as an analytical category, arguing that it is prominent in all decisions but other factors such as economic need or occupational opportunity may override it. Of significance is the absence of a category for career/worker identity. Indeed the impact of becoming a mother on career/worker identity is not a focus of the literature as a whole during this period of mothering young children (see for example Johnston and Swanson, 2007). The discussions are about managing the competing demands, reducing the tensions, finding a balance – in other words, they are about managing the two, practically and ideologically. There are references to career/worker identity being subjugated amongst some stay-at-home mothers (Johnston and Swanson, 2007) and compromised, particularly for some part-time working mothers (Vincent et al., 2004), but no indication of what this means *longer-term* with regards to a woman's sense of and expectations for worker/career identity. The overriding sense is that during this early phase motherhood dominates in terms of identity construction, and career/worker identity is 'on-hold' for many, often even if working full-time (Garey, 1999).

Existing research indicates that not managing the competing time demands of working and mothering can result in stress, tension, a sense of being overwhelmed. This can impact negatively not just on a woman's wellbeing but also her sense of self – a feeling of

not being a 'good' (enough) mother or worker, being unable to dedicate enough time to one or other or both (Johnston and Swanson, 2007). Hence, as Golden (2001) points out, in the context of mothering and working, managing time is in fact an identity issue. Discussions on balancing or integrating the two activities to avoid family conflict or spill over are about practical management but also impacts on identities. Strategies to reduce time pressures can be both practical and/or ideological. Reducing working hours is a popular practical strategy in the UK (Houston and Marks, 2005), but ideological 'reframing' may also be used to shift the mothering expectation from permanent maternal presence to quality periodic presence (Johnston and Swanson, 2006). Studies have shown that nurses, and some other shift workers, sometimes choose night shifts in order to 'be there' during the day – although asleep and the children at school for part of the time, they are able to construct themselves as mothers who are available, at home, during the day (Maher et al., 2010, Garey, 1999).

Garey (1999) conceptualises the relationship as 'weaving', and others have similarly used this term (Bailey, 2000, Hattery, 2001, Miller, 2007). Garey argues that it is misleading to try to explore mother and worker identities separately since 'they are not separately and on their own, the life or the person' (p.192). She proposes the identities are integrated – a worker with children, and a mother who works. She is not suggesting that an integrated mother-worker life is without struggles or constraints, rather she is using integrated to express connected, woven together into the fabric of life. Further studies also argue against conceptualizing a double identity, assuming the two are always in competition. Bailey (2000: p.68), for example, also uses the term 'weaving' but twins this with the concept of 'inter-spatiality' in describing the way the new mothers in her research constructed 'an altered sense of self'. She found continuities, overlaps and transposition - for example, worker identity as a source of continuity and employment being re-conceptualised in caring and non-hierarchical terms. She also found conflicts and requirements for separating the identities - for example, motherhood threatening a woman's professional identity during pregnancy and a requirement to separate work as time and space for themselves. Both Garey (1999) and Bailey (2000) emphasise the highly individual way in which women 'weave' together their identities.

It seems that in certain social or cultural contexts the two identities are more clearly integrated, being constructed in such a way that working is a requisite part of 'good' mothering. Collins (1991) describes the 'both/and' nature of mothering and working for Black American women. Here, a 'good' mother works to help provide for her child and improve her economic and social position. Duncan et al. (2003) added a 'mother-worker integral' position to their model of mothers' values systems, aiming to break out of the

dichotomy stalemate. They too identified African-Caribbean mothers' rationalities fitting this position, but the majority of White mothers were still situated somewhere between 'primarily mother' and 'primarily worker'. In Sweden, in the context of a strong gender equality discourse, 'a woman who is 'only' a mother risks (excluding the infant period) having her femininity questioned' (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson, 2001:p.425). Thus mothers need to be happy to raise happy children, and to be happy they must maintain a separate sphere and sense of self, predominantly recognised in this context as a sense of self as a working woman.

Johnston and Swanson (2007) draw on dialectic theory that conceptualises mother-worker identities as 'both/and' rather than dichotomous. They explore *reframing*, *separating* (either temporally or ideologically), *selecting* and *neutralising* as responses to the dialectic – bringing together a number of conceptions touched on in the discussion above. I will critique this conceptualisation in detail and build on it in the development of a theoretical framework (see Ch.3). It will be argued that a focus on dialectics can help extend the theorising about the relationship – focusing attention on what is happening at the intersection, providing a framework for thinking about the different ways in which women are managing their two interconnected identities and how they are interacting.

1.5 Conclusion

A large proportion of the literature on combining work and motherhood reviewed in this chapter focuses either on mothers of pre-school children or mothers of children under 12, particularly amongst the qualitative studies that are concerned with identity. Far less attention has been paid to combining work and motherhood with older children.

Understanding the literature pertaining to the early stages of motherhood and combining this with work provides crucial context to appreciating the experiences and sense-making of mothers sustaining part-time working, not least, because it sets the scene within which 'choices' are made. This chapter has described the dominance of an 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) ideology, with its emphasis on the morality of 'good' mothering and focus on children's needs (May, 2008), and the interweaving of an essentialist discourse of 'natural' mothering (Lupton, 2000). It has highlighted the importance of appreciating distinctions in the construction of 'good' mothering through lived experience of different social, cultural and material contexts (1.2.3) and situating motherhood identity within gendered relationships of care (1.3). This review has indicated the significance of identity transformation on becoming a mother (Bailey, 1999, Miller, 2005), the fact that initial decisions regarding work and home may be tenuous and temporary (Vincent et al, 2004) and career identity may be 'on hold' (Bailey, 2000, Johnston and Swanson, 2007).

Prominent, is the implication of a complex web of contradictions, competing pulls and constraints, ideological and intangible as well as practical and structural, within which a work-home status 'choice' is made and mothering and working are managed (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004, Houston and Marks, 2005, Johnston and Swanson, 2007). Hakim's Preference Theory (2000, 2004) and critiques of this theorising, particularly regarding Duncan and Edwards' 'gendered moral rationalities' (1999, 2003) will become core to the argument put forward by this thesis. The depiction of the context for decision-making and identity construction being a matrix of competing and potentially contradictory pulls and the conceptualisation of mother-worker identities being dialectically unified and opposed (Johnston and Swanson, 2007) are drawn on to guide the development of a dialogic framework outlined in Chapter 3.

Within the literature on combining work and motherhood with young children, the overall impression is that mothers are concentrating on their new identity as mothers, and on achieving 'intensive mothering' expectations (Hays, 1996). Worker identity is apparent as an element of continuity (Bailey, 2000). But there is little reference to career identity and how motherhood impacts on this, with the emphasis being on the practicalities of managing work and caring for young children where part-time working is often considered a good option (Johnston and Swanson, 2007, Vincent et al., 2004). The next Chapter turns to organisational literature to engage more deeply with worker/career identity and part-time employment. Bearing in mind the gap in the literature on a life-stage perspective of mothering older children and sustaining part-time working, this review will draw on broader literature on work-life balance and specific strands of literature relating to mothering/parenting adolescents.

Chapter 2

Working in part-time employment

2.1 Introduction

Of the almost sixty percent of mothers who have returned to work whilst they still have pre-school children, fifty-eight percent are working part-time (ONS, Q2, 2011). In early motherhood, part-time working is often considered favourably, but it seems that the focus at this stage is on achieving mothering expectations and hence worker/career identity is often 'on hold' (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004, Johnston and Swanson, 2006). Mothers do admit to compromises, but these are seemingly acceptable at this stage, where the priority is finding ways of managing work alongside mothering, finding ways of making it fit (Johnston and Swanson, 2007). The settlements made at this stage have been described as 'nebulous' and 'temporary' (Vincent et al., 2004).

Against this background, this chapter now turns to focus on worker/career identity and part-time employment, exploring part-time working more generally and investigating strands of literature of relevance to *sustained* part-time working. Section 2.2 outlines the core debates in the sociology of work regarding theories of flexibility, consumption and individualisation and their impact on the centrality of work to individuals' identities, and then investigates how this is researched empirically. The section on gender and part-time working (2.3) begins by locating, defining and describing part-time work, mainly from a quantitative perspective. It examines particular constraints and issues relating to part-time working, before reviewing qualitative studies bringing to life experiences of women working part-time at professional/higher levels. Section 2.4 turns to gender and 'work-life balance', providing a further perspective on taking up and sustaining part-time working by investigating discourses of and challenges to 'work-life balance'. The final section (2.5) draws together literature on mothering *older* children that might relate to sustaining part-time working.

2.2 Worker identity

Fineman et al (2010) suggest that worker identity becomes part of a person's self-image at an early age, with children being encouraged to think about what they will do when they grow up. A key debate in the literature on worker identity, however, is concerned with work orientation or the centrality of work to people's identities, in a context where flexibility, consumption and individualisation have become dominant discourses (Bauman, 1998, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, Gabriel, 2005, Sennett, 1998). Section 2.2.1 explores debates on the power of these influences and their interconnections from a

theoretical perspective. Section 2.2.2 then turns to work orientation and centrality, and the different dimensions that empirical research suggests are involved in the meaning of work and career. In the process, debates about the distinctions in worker identity construction relating to gender, class and education will become apparent.

2.2.1 Flexibility, consumption and individualisation

Max Weber (1958) argued that the work ethic apparent in modernity stemmed from Puritan values such as hard work, frugality and suppression of desires. He came on to propose that bureaucratic and instrumental rationality would result in trapping individuals within an 'iron cage', disenchanted, passive and emotionless (Weber, 1978). Some theorists have argued that in post-modernity the landscape in which work is played out appears to be changing. For example, Sennett (1998) proposes that the focus on bureaucratic rigidity has shifted to flexibility. Elsewhere, Bauman (1988, 1996, 1998) contends that the emphasis on production has given way to consumption. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggest that the prominence of the masses has ebbed in favour of individualisation. Fineman et al (2010) argue that, taken together, the forces of flexibility, consumption and individualisation are both reshaping organisations, as well as the way in which individuals identify with work.

Gabriel (2005) has suggested that Weber's (1978) 'iron cage' might today be replaced by the twin metaphors of 'glass cages' of work and 'glass palaces' of consumption. He suggests both glass 'cages' and 'palaces' produce distinct, new 'constraints' and 'malaise', but also distinct 'consolations' and 'possibilities of contestation and challenge' for identity construction (p.24). He also identifies a number of shared features:

An emphasis on display, an invisibility of constraints, a powerful illusion of choice, a glamorization of image and an ironic question mark over whether freedom lies this side or that side of the glass (p.24).

This conceptualisation captures the ambiguities and contradictions that he maintains arise as discourses of flexibility, consumption and individualisation collide. Gabriel draws on theorists intensely pessimistic about the consequences of these types of collisions – for example Sennett (1998), who focuses on the deep anxiety and insecurity in today's flexible workplaces (a flexibility driven by the globalisation of markets and ever-changing technologies). Sennett (1998) argues that this, together with an internalisation of feeling they have a 'choice' and that career success is up to them, results in individuals chasing opportunities, never satisfied, never secure, while at the same time losing touch with values of commitment and caring – what Sennett calls a 'corrosion of character'. Gabriel

also draws on theorists more optimistic about the outcomes. For example George Ritzer (1999), who argues that management's shift in focus from production and hard-working employees to consumption and feeding consumer fantasies is beneficial to individuals, providing opportunities for 're-enchantment' in an otherwise 'dis-encharnted' world. Flexibility and individualisation are incorporated positively, with individuals having the freedom and flexibility to 'choose' their lifestyles and identities through their consumption practices.

The inter-connection of these discourses and their impact on identities has been theorised from numerous different perspectives. Broadly speaking, theorists are arguing whether individuals are predominantly shaping their identities through their work/career experiences or consumer experiences (see Fineman et al., 2010). However, interpretations vary, of both the nature of these experiences and outcomes regarding work identity. For example, in contrast to Sennett (1998), where work insecurity is linked to an inability to create coherent identity narratives, some authors (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996, Hall, 1996) emphasise the freedoms and opportunities for controlling one's own destiny and for self-fulfilment that flexible, in some cases 'boundaryless' (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) careers can offer. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that individualisation has been wrongly demonised. Drawing on studies of values (for example Inglehart, 1990, Yankelovitch et al., 1985), they argue that younger generations, while valuing freedom and self-assertion, are in fact becoming *less* materialistic – rather than chasing more income and career success, suffering from Sennett's (1998) decline of values, 'freedom's children' are valuing control over their 'own time' more highly.

Bauman (1988, 1996, 1998) takes a different tack and contends that the 'work ethic' is replaced in post-modernity⁸ by the 'consumer ethic', describing work as '(at best) instrumental' (1988: p.75), it simply provides the means and freedom to consume. His emphasis, however, rather than being on enchantment and fantasy like Ritzer (1999), is on the continual search for unique selfhood, the opportunity for repeated reinvention (1988). As a result, the new poor are 'failed consumers' (1998). In contesting Bauman, Gabriel and Lang (2006) propose that work, far from being replaced, remains a fundamental part of people's lives and identities.

Bunting (2004) maintains that from an organisational point of view - in a world of global markets, sophisticated consumers and constantly upgraded technology - management require a work force that is both highly motivated (and therefore hard working) and

⁸ Bauman sees post-modernity as a distinct period or shift from modernity, unlike some other authors, such as Giddens (1991), who argues that changes in modernity are gradual and as such, today we are in period of late modernity.

flexible (available when required). Fineman et al (2010) reason that it is in an organisation's interest to implement management practices that encourage the notion of work being a core source of self-esteem and fulfilment. Millar (2008) suggests that policy discourse has also been encouraging the idea of work being beneficial to people's wellbeing – psychologically as well as economically (see 1.4.1).

In the next section, the different ways in which worker/career identity is researched at an empirical level is explored.

2.2.2 Work commitment, centrality and orientation

A concept used for some time fairly widely for work commitment is the so-called 'Lottery Question' – that is, whether an individual would continue to work if they had no need to financially (Gallie et al., 1994, Johnston and Swanson, 2007, Walters, 2005, Warr, 1999). Research in the UK (Gallie et al., 1994, Rose, 2005) purports to show that since the 1980's around two-thirds of those currently in the labour market would chose to continue to work. Rose (2005: p.137) identifies⁹ a linear progression from those with no qualifications at just over half to those university educated at three-quarters. He suggests that this 'provides absolutely no support for any 'abandonment thesis' of a work ethic among the higher educated in a post-industrial economy' (p.136). However, since this measure is hypothetical and does not differentiate between intensity of commitment, it is usually used in conjunction with other measures that attempt to delve deeper into the relationship of work to identity (Johnston and Swanson, 2007, Rose, 2005, Walters, 2005).

Another perspective on evaluating commitment to work is career outlook. The fact that there is no unified conception of 'career' (Li et al., 2002) makes this concept potentially problematic. Rose (2005: p.136) has suggested that 'the notion of career can vary between employee groups, but always embodies some notion of employment planning and commitment'. A sense of career is also thought to have strong connotations of progression over time, an unsuccessful career generally characterized by stagnation and a failure to be promoted up the ladder (Fineman et al., 2010).

Rose's (2005: p.136-8) analysis of data (ONS Omnibus survey, 2001) on individuals seeing themselves as having a career shows an even more marked linear progression from no qualifications (at 37%) up to degree (at 89%) than he found for non-financial commitment. This suggests the more educated someone is, the more likely they are to identify with a 'sense of career'. Goldthorpe's employment relations theory (see

⁹ Drawing on data from the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI, 1985: 3650 employees) and Working in Britain (WIB, 2001: 2132 employees) surveys.

discussion in Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992) has proposed that this distinction can be explained by the fact that clear career opportunities are more likely to be linked with service-class jobs than working-class jobs. Studies have indicated that a sense of career appears to be growing amongst the working-class (James, 2008, Li et al., 2002) and Rose's (2005: p.136-8) analysis indicated a rise amongst those with no or lower qualifications. Li et al (2002) identified the crucial distinction between those with and without a sense of career being whether or not they exercised forethought or planning.

Research on unemployment and its impact on self-identity provides an alternative perspective on the importance of work to individuals. The loss of employment is said to not only trigger stress related to income loss, but is also often associated with a negative impact on sense of self – a loss of identity and self-esteem (Fineman et al., 2010, Gabriel et al., 2010, Riley, 2003, Wilcott and Griffin, 2004). Employment is considered to have an anchoring effect, providing a social status, social contact with others and a sense of motivation or structure to one's life (Fineman et al., 2010). Gabriel et al. (2010), in a study of unemployed professionals in their fifties, indicated that their participants were using one of three 'coping' strategies. They identified a 'temporary derailment' narrative, holding on to the situation being just temporary, and a 'moratorium' narrative, being able to reframe the situation positively as an opportunity for reinvention. An 'end-of-the-road' narrative was imbued with a note of fatalism and despair, in facing no future work identity. The authors discerned parallels between these narratives and the illness narratives of 'restitution', 'quest' and 'chaos' found in Frank's (1995) 'The wounded storyteller'. Frank's narratives will become key references in the theoretical framework (see 3.3.3).

Elsewhere, Hakim's Preference Theory (2000, 2004, 2007, 2005) has been central to recent debates on work orientation. She positioned her theory as a response to approaches to work orientation invariably being focused on the male breadwinner and ignoring female workers. Her core argument is that distinctions between men and women's work patterns can predominantly be explained by women's 'choices' and preferences. She has argued that this theory is not gender-essentialist, as critics (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005) have declared, and has suggested that men's 'choices' differ, resulting in only a negligible group of home-centred men, and a split between adaptive and work-centred (Hakim, 2004). A key criticism has been the emphasis on individual agency and lack of acknowledgement of structural constraints and changing circumstances at home and at work (Crompton and Harris, 1997, Crompton and Lyonette, 2008, McRae, 2003, Padfield and Proctor, 1998, Walters, 2005). Others evidence class distinctions (Crompton, 2010, James, 2008) and the influence of access to resources, again

pointing to how this can result in changes in orientation towards work over time, contradicting Hakim's (2004) proposal that orientation is fixed early on.

Nolan (2009) explored men's work orientations in relation to Hakim's Preference Theory (2003). She argues that men too are constrained in their work 'choices' (not least the continued expectation to be a 'breadwinner') and that their orientations change according to circumstances (for example, job insecurity). She proposes that 'adaptives', while meaningful, is not particularly useful, since there is too much heterogeneity within 'adaptives', both between and *within* genders. She argues for a more nuanced approach to conceptualising the work orientation of 'adaptives', one that dynamically links orientations or rationales with job facet priorities.

In the debates fuelled by Hakim's (2004) Preference Theory, what seems to have particularly incensed feminists striving for gender equality at work is that Hakim has suggested that only a small proportion of women are fully committed to work and careers. Authors argue that from a management perspective, 'ideal' workers are totally committed, flexible and motivated and do not moderate their commitment for family reasons (Fineman et al., 2010, Gambles et al., 2006, Gerson, 2004). Working mothers have been reported as feeling the pressure of being seen as lacking in commitment, and have subsequently felt the need to work extra hard to make up for this (Grady and McCarthy, 2008, Liff and Ward, 2001, Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). Hoque and Kirkpatrick (2003) purport that working long hours has become a proxy for commitment; and Smithson (2005) maintains that evidencing commitment is considered vital for promotion. On this basis, research appears to have demonstrated that perceptions of lack of commitment can limit working mothers' promotion prospects, particularly into senior or managerial positions (King, 2008, Liff and Ward, 2001). Furthermore, Liff and Ward's (2001) research indicates that women internalise such perceptions, and thus do not put themselves forward for promotion or senior management positions. As will become apparent, the issue of 'lack' of commitment is considered even more pronounced for part-time working mothers.

While work orientation and centrality is often core to research on worker identity, studies also consider many further aspects of work that individuals may be particularly identifying with. These include, for example, distinguishing between instrumental and expressive rationales (see for example, Rose, 2005), and investigating extrinsic (relating to employment conditions) and intrinsic (relating to satisfaction from the nature of the work) aspects of job satisfaction (see for example King, 2008, Rose, 2005, Walters, 2005).

Some of these aspects are drawn on during the course of the next section regarding how individuals relate to part-time working.

2.3 Gender and part-time employment

Section 2.3.1 provides a contextual picture of part-time working in the UK, wherein its highly gendered nature is highlighted. Section 2.3.2 continues to draw on mainly quantitative studies to examine the particular constraints and issues relating to part-time employment. For example, its association with working below potential and indications that 'good' part-time working (negotiated at a higher skilled level, rather than constructed by employers at a lower level) appears to be framed as short-term. Qualitative studies exploring the experiences of women working part-time at higher/professional are examined in 2.3.3.

2.3.1. Defining and describing part-time work

According to Labour Force Survey (Office for National Statistics) figures for the second quarter of 2011, two-thirds of women with dependent children are in employment. Women's participation has risen dramatically in the past half decade in the UK: Scott's (2008) analysis found the equivalent figure in the 1960 ONS data to be 30 percent. Scott (2008) identifies much of this rise being in part-time working, although the Office for National Statistics (2010) in a recent report on working mothers using their Labour Force Survey data, indicated that since the mid-1990's the proportion working part-time has remained relatively stable, with a slight rise in full-time working. Nonetheless, their second quarter 2011 figures indicate that of the two thirds of women with dependent children who are working, over half (55%) are working part-time. Within the breakdown of this data, looking at women with a youngest child pre-school, more are not working (41%), and considerably more are working part-time (34%) than full-time (25%). When the youngest dependent child is aged 11-15, fewer women are not working (23%), but slightly more are still working part-time (40%) than full-time (37%). Women make up three-quarters of part-time workers (ONS, Q3, 2011), and half of them do not have dependent children – most of these remaining in part-time work after child rearing (Walby, 2007).

There are no official number of hours that distinguish between part and full-time working. Legislation¹⁰ regarding part-time workers' terms and conditions of employment simply defines a part-time worker as *not* identifiable as a full-time worker. This is based on if the worker is 'paid wholly or in part by reference to the time he works and, having regard to

¹⁰ The Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000.

the custom and practice of the employer in relation to workers employed by the worker's employer under the same type of contract' (p.2). Studies tend to refer to part-time working being below 30 hours per week (Gallie and Zhou, 2011, Millar et al., 2006). However, research indicates that patterns and hours of work vary dramatically – from very short hours to almost full-time; and from shorter hours across five days, to fewer full-time days, to term-time only (Millar et al., 2006). Hours may include shift work or atypical hours, including evening, night or weekend hours (La Valle et al., 2002, Garey, 1999) and demand for work at atypical hours has intensified (Le Bihan and Martin, 2004) in line with the requirement for greater flexibility discussed earlier in 2.2.1.

According to UK Labour Market statistics (ONS, Q3, 2011), 12 percent of female part-timers are self-employed. This data (ONS, Q3, 2011) also indicates that almost 5 percent of employed women have second jobs. Simic and Sethi's (2002) earlier analysis of Labour Force Survey data suggested that the number of people with second jobs had seen an increase, especially amongst women working part-time – by 2001 they made up 38 percent of those with second jobs, and 8 percent of women working part-time had two jobs, mostly both low waged.

For the purposes of certain aspects of legislation and management practices, part-time working can be located within the broader concept of flexible working - for example, the right for parents with children under 17 to request flexible working¹¹. In the context of this legislation, flexible working relates to variations regarding the number of hours worked and the times when these hours are worked, as well as the notion of working flexibly from home. Part-time working can include other aspects of flexibility. However, full-time workers can also work flexibly. Walby (2007) argues that whilst there are contradictory predictions in relation to whether or not part-time working will rise or decrease, flexible hours working is rising and expected to increase.

2.3.2 Particular constraints and issues relating to part-time employment

According to the Department of Trade and Industry (2003), the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations were introduced in 2000 to 'ensure that Britain's part-timers are not treated less favourably than comparable full-timers in their terms and conditions, unless it is objectively justified'. The legislation states (pages 11-13) that part-time workers are therefore entitled to, for example, the same rights of pay, the same entitlements such as holiday and parental leave, and employers should 'not exclude part-time staff simply because they work part-time' (p.12).

¹¹ The Flexible Working (Eligibility, Complaints and Remedies) (Amendment) Regulations 2009.

However, the concentration of part-time working in low paid, low status jobs is well documented (Gambles et al., 2006, Grant et al., 2005, Jenkins, 2004, Manning and Petrongolo, 2008, Millar et al., 2006). Grant et al (2005) suggest that from a workforce supply perspective, the jobs most likely to be constructed as part-time are low level, lower skilled jobs, concentrated into particular sectors such as the service sector. According to their investigation of twenty workplaces for the Equal Opportunities Commission, this kind of low paid and low skilled work is constructed by organisations as either ‘task-based’, that is tasks that can be carried out in less than a day (e.g. care assistants), or ‘demand-based’ (e.g. check-out operators). Jenkins (2004) reports on the way in which female part-time workers were used in six workplace case studies, distinguishing between ‘core’, ‘peak’ and ‘ancillary’ use of part-time labour.

Both Grant et al and Jenkins propose that part-time work *constructed* as low skilled, flexible, cheap labour tends to marginalise female part-time workers. While much of part-time working is concentrated in lower skilled, low pay jobs, a slim strand in the literature turns to those working part-time in more skilled and higher status jobs (see 2.3.3). A key distinction often framed in the literature is that higher skilled and higher status jobs tend not be constructed as part-time jobs by organisations – rather they are usually *negotiated* individually by women requesting to work part-time (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010, Edwards and Robinson, 2001, Grant et al., 2005). Tilly (1996) made a distinction between ‘good’ ‘retention’ part-time jobs and ‘bad’ ‘secondary’ part-time jobs. However, as Hoque and Kirkpatrick (2003) point out, there is a debate in the literature between those who argue that marginalisation for negotiated part-time working at a professional/managerial level less is less pronounced, and those who propose that marginalisation still occurs.

Recent literature has noted an increase in women working part-time at higher occupational levels in the UK (Dick and Hyde, 2006, Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010, Gallie and Zhou, 2011). Gallie and Zhou’s (2011) analysis of the Skills Survey series¹² data indicates that by 2006, a quarter of women working part-time were doing so as Managers, Professionals or Associate Professionals and technicians. They found this to have increased by 7.5 percentage points since 1992, although this compares to a rise of 14 percentage points amongst full-time working mothers to over fifty per cent. Within this rise, their analysis indicates that opening up to managerial level appears to be progressing slowly (see also Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010), with managers accounting for just 3.9 percent of women working part-time, compared to 15.7 percent of women working full-time and 20.3 percent of men working full-time.

¹² This survey comprised four waves including 1992: sample 3,467, response rate 72%; 1997: 2,467, 67%; 2001: 3,990, 66%; 2006: 4,800, 62%.

Grant et al's (2005) study looked at the issue of part-timers working below their potential. They found that over half (53%) of 219 women working part-time across twenty workplaces were found to be working below their potential – conceptualised as working at a level lower than previously-held jobs or than their qualifications would have indicated. This has been referred to as the 'hidden brain drain' (EOC, 2005), and not only as a waste of human capital in terms of education and skills (Connolly and Gregory, 2008, Grant et al., 2005) but also contributing to gender inequality (Walby, 2007). There has been a significant rise in the educational attainment of women, with the proportion of female to male graduates up from about a quarter in the late 1960's to over a half by 2007 (Perrons, 2009). Gallie and Zhou's (2011) analysis of the Skills Survey series indicates that in 2006 almost a quarter of part-time workers were found to have been educated to degree level or higher, a rise of 6.3 percentage points since 1992 (although this compares to a rise of 15.5 percentage points amongst full-time working women). Connolly and Gregory (2008) analysed the incidence of occupational downgrading at the time of moving from full-time to part-time, and found that this occurred for a quarter of women. Their analysis suggested two-thirds of nurses leaving full-time nursing were under-utilising their skills by becoming care assistants. One-fifth of women from professional and associate professional occupations were identified as downgrading in this research, half of these to low-level part-time jobs, and almost thirty per cent of corporate managers were identified as moving down, two-thirds of these to clerical jobs. Downgrading was considerably higher (43%) for those who also changed employer.

Connolly and Gregory (2009) contend that the gender pay gap is steadily declining, driven by women's rising educational attainment and an associated rise in labour market attachment and occupational diversity. However, Manning and Petrongolo's (2008) study indicates that the pay gap between women working part-time and those working full-time has risen considerably over the last three decades, and hourly earnings are now 25 percent less for women working part-time. The authors suggest that demographic differences account for half of the pay penalty. The other half, they attribute to increasing occupational segregation and the rise in wage inequality generally, between occupational levels and sectors.

Connolly and Gregory (2009: p.i77) sum up the cumulative impact on earnings trajectories of switching to part-time, particularly if this also involves downgrading:

Part-time employment reduces the accumulation of work experience; this can be expected to have a permanent depressive effect on future earnings, even after return to full-time work. When the switch to a part-time job also involves a change of

employer, as often occurs, seniority and firm-specific capital are lost. Most challengingly, particularly for more educated women, when a part-time job is not simply a reduced-hours version of a previous full-time job but involves occupational downgrading, the return to higher-level skills is lost and career-building likely to be damaged.

In a subsequent study, Connolly and Gregory (2010) have drawn distinctions between those using part-time working for a short-term spell during a full-time career while children are young (what they call the 'maintenance' pathway) and those who are engaged in part-time work longer term, often with periods out of work (the 'exclusionary' pathway). They suggest that around two-thirds of working women will work part-time at some point during their working lives, although few will work part-time throughout. This study has the advantage of being longitudinal. The authors followed a 1958 cohort of women across three sweeps of the National Childhood Development Survey at age twenty-three, thirty-three and forty-two (NCDS, 1981, 1991, 2000). Their analysis indicates that women at all educational levels engaged in part-time working. Those remaining in education beyond nineteen were more likely to work full-time and less likely not to work after education than those with lower educational attainment. They were also likely to have children later in life. However, the data analysis suggested that a similar proportion entered into part-time work, and after the age of thirty-five there was considerable convergence in level of engagement between those with different levels of education.

Connolly and Gregory argue that the probability of moving into full-time work peaks at five years in part-time work – whether previously working full-time (probability 60%) or not working (probability 40%). After a spell of seven or eight years in part-time work, the women in the sample were more likely to stay in part-time work than enter into full-time work or exit work. This probability steadily rises, so that after fifteen years (the length covered in the analysis), the probability of staying in part-time work is 80 percent if the woman worked full-time beforehand and 85 percent if not working.

Connolly and Gregory's (2010) longitudinal research analysis suggests that there are two tracks 'at least' (p.926) for part-time workers, serving as both a short-term support to a full-time career and a 'trap or dead-end'. Studies (Connolly and Gregory, 2010, Connolly and Gregory, 2008, Houston and Marks, 2005, Tilly, 1996) appear fairly consistent in indicating that part-time penalties in terms of pay, downgrading and progression are reduced longer-term if a woman stays with a previous employer where she has worked full-time, reducing her hours but not her use of skills, and stays in part-time work for a

relatively short time period. This depiction seems to correlate with Tilly's (1996) 'good retention' part-time jobs.

However, in the next section, I turn to qualitative studies exploring the *experiences* of part-time workers from the perspective of women in what might be categorised as 'good' 'retention' jobs in professional/higher level jobs (Edwards and Robinson, 2001, Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010). These studies indicate that Tilly's (1996) 'retention' jobs are not all 'good', and provide support for those who argue that even at higher levels, where part-time working is generally negotiated, there can be costs to part-time workers and they can be treated unequally (see also Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003).

2.3.3 Part-time working in professional/higher level jobs

Edwards and Robinson (2001) explored part-time working in skilled occupations, taking two case studies of the London-based Metropolitan Police and the National Health Service Hospital Trust. The former involved depth interviews with two hundred part-time police officers and a number of line managers. The second drew on twenty-six depth interviews split between part-time nurses and managers of part-time nurses. These participants were exclusively full-time employees who negotiated part-time hours. The authors proposed that these could be described as 'better' part-time jobs, being permanent, secure jobs where pay and conditions were pro-rated – furthermore, they described these employees as having potential bargaining power as high turnover (and in the case of the Met, low levels of female employees) suggested retaining these skilled employees could be in the employers' interests. Nonetheless, they concluded that equality with full-time employees had yet to be achieved. They argued that 'minimum effort had been made to adapt the pattern of work to integrate part-timers, leading to marginalisation and a diminution of opportunities for career development and progression' (p.448). The authors reported that in both studies, not only were part-timers given fewer opportunities for training and development (for example, none of the police officers had been successful in gaining a place on an elite training course), they were often placed away from central functions and roles and considered inappropriate for managerial or supervisory roles. Vacancies were invariably advertised as full-time representing a deterrent to applying.

However, Edwards and Robinson (2001) acknowledged that not all part-time participants were disadvantaged, and some managed to reach more senior positions. While they found line managers tended to 'marginalise, under-use and under-develop part-timers, detracting from their value to the employer' (p.449), they noted that managerial attitudes (and level of discretion allowed them in their management of part-time workers) differed between and within the two cases, as did the power positions of the individuals.

Furthermore, the vast majority of participants in both studies reported that their job satisfaction had gone up as a result of going part-time - despite the narrowing of roles, diminution of promotion prospects, and difficulties related to lack of full integration (such as communication and continuation of care/service). The authors indicated that this rise was linked to both a better work-home balance and the benefits to energy levels and enthusiasm at work the part-timers associate with reduced stress levels.

Recently, Tomlinson and Durbin (2010, Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010) have reported on sixteen in-depth semi-structured interviews exploring female part-time managers' working lives within the context of their life histories. All were partnered, White, had a child under 12, and were located in the South of England. All had held full-time managerial positions, mostly in the private sector, before negotiating part-time with their employer. Once again, the theme of marginalisation was a prominent one in the authors' account of the research: 'part-time work, even at managerial level, remains gendered, marginalized and relatively careerless' (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010: p.636). Careers were described as having 'stalled' once the managers went part-time on having children, both in terms of mobility and progression. This was associated with frustration and disappointment. The authors identified three respondents as being more satisfied with their work-life balance and employment prospects, arguing that this derived from the clear demarcation laid down between work and home, and their acceptance that their career was 'on hold'. They suggested the majority, however, were struggling to achieve their aspirations of a varied and developing career, feeling over-looked and considered less committed. Furthermore, they indicated that most were not achieving the work-life balance they were hoping for by going part-time. They were reported as working intensively (often more so than before, working with no breaks, missing important networking opportunities) beyond contracted hours and experiencing a great deal of spill-over into non-work time, predominantly due to lack of appropriate reallocation of work when they reduced their hours.

In recent article extending their work with female part-time working managers, Durbin and Tomlinson (2014) explored career progression and links with mentors and role models. They found that the careers of the majority of their 27 participants stalled after a transition to part-time work, and that their struggle to progress seemed to be exacerbated by a lack of mentors and positive role models. They supported previous research (Singh et al., 2002) that highlighted benefits of mentoring for women, proposing that this might be particularly so at the mid-career stage of their participants. More than half identified negative role models and the authors lamented on the paucity of female part-time working managers being perceived to be achieving both in their career and in balancing this with

caring for children, despite the significant growth in part-time working in the UK over recent decades.

Dick and Hyde (2006) review the literature on part-time working amongst professional women and question why there appears to be little active resistance to being disadvantaged. They point, for example, to the socially constructed link between time and professionalism, whereby part-time working is inherently positioned as less than 'ideal' (Lewis, 1997). This they argue can lead to individuals legitimating disadvantage, for example, by considering that their part-time working may be disadvantaging their organisation (Lawrence and Corbin, 2003), or internalising the notion that management roles require full-time working (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). Thus, even if they feel negatively about being marginalised, they may 'accept' this an inevitable consequence. However, they also note that there is often ambivalence detected in professional women's accounts of part-time working, and that positives, such as increased energy levels and enthusiasm (as per Edwards and Robinson, 2001, above) could be counter-balancing some of the negatives.

2.4 Gender and 'work-life balance'¹³

This section turns to pertinent aspects of work-life balance literature, providing a further perspective from which to consider part-time working. It is important contextually to understand what might be relevant to mothers sustaining part-time working – for example, potential positives of work-life balance and/or possibly being put off full-time work by perceptions of a long hours, work intense culture. Section 2.4.1 examines discourses of work-life balance, looking at these in the context of policies and organisational cultures. Section 2.4.2 turns to challenges to 'work-life balance' made by academics – for example, the continuing gendering of the discourse, despite the gender-neutral term, and challenges to the notion of trying to 'balance' work and life.

2.4.1 Discourses of work-life balance

Work-life balance discourses, with an emphasis on choice, diversity and flexibility, are widely reported to have taken the place of previous academic, organisational and government discourses focusing on equal opportunities and family-friendly policies (Fleetwood, 2007a, Gregory and Milner, 2009, Lewis, 2008, Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). It has been suggested by Lewis (2008) that this has in part been in response to the perceived need to broaden the relevance of policies and practices to include fathers. As

¹³ I will retain this terminology, as it is the most commonly used, although as will become apparent, it is contested.

described in section 1.3, there has been much call for men to take a greater part in care work. It has also been reported that many men would like to reduce their hours and help more, but feel unable/unwilling to in the context of current organisational cultures (Smithson, 2005). Take-up of family-friendly practices by fathers has been very low (Sheridan, 2004). The extension from 'family' to 'life' incorporates both an intention to extend to non-parents and to a broader definition of personal life.

The notion of 'work-life balance' implies there are two spheres ('work' and 'life') that require 'balancing'. The implied 'imbalance' tends to refer to 'work' tipping the balance and dominating, and 'life' losing out and being squeezed. Prominent in the literature are references to long hours of work (Gambles et al., 2006, Sheridan, 2004), overwork (Bunting, 2004) and work intensification (Burchell and Fagan, 2004, Green, 2004). Britain's full-time workers have the longest full-time working hours in Europe (White et al., 2003), and long working hours have been linked to stress and work-life conflict. Crompton and Lyonette's (2006) comparative quantitative study¹⁴ of full-time workers, for example, found Britain to have higher levels of work-life conflict than Finland, Norway, France and Portugal and working hours was the most significant predictor. Here, work-life conflict was defined through statements relating to tiredness through overwork in one sphere having a negative impact on functioning in the other sphere or difficulties in managing the two due to tiredness or too much to do. Dex and Bond (2005) in another quantitative study found long working hours (48 hours+) to have the largest single effect on promoting work-life imbalance, when they explored work-life balance and its potential covariates (White et al., 2003).

Work intensification has been researched quantitatively using measures such as proportion of time working at a high speed (Burchell and Fagan, 2004, Green, 2004), being required to work very hard and working under a lot of tension (Green, 2004). Studies have identified negative associations between work intensification and health or wellbeing at work (such as work strain/stress) (Burchell and Fagan, 2004, Green, 2004) and work intensity and work-life balance (Burchell and Fagan, 2004). Both these studies suggest work effort was intensifying during the 1990's, but appeared to have stabilised in the early 2000's.

In the context of long and intense working hours, the concept of work-life balance is thus bound up with notions of time and energy – and more specifically, with not having *enough* time and energy for other parts of life – and notions of personal and family wellbeing. Section 1.3.1 outlined some of the literature associated with work-life balance on time

¹⁴ This study drew on the Family 2002 module of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP).

squeeze/time poverty, the difficulties and stresses of trying to 'balance' work and life, and impacts of work (dominating) on family life. Time for caring commitments, particularly looking after young children, is thus a dominant theme of work-life balance discourses.

Hochschild's (1997) 'Time Bind' provides a bleak view of the pull of a long-hours working culture in the US winning out to time for home, family relationships and caring commitments. Having specifically chosen an organisation known for its family-friendly policies, she found that amongst employees with children under 12, only 4 percent of men and 13 percent of women worked less than 40 hours. Eileen was one of a minority of part-time working mothers. Her story vividly illustrated the constraints to 'choice' – firstly that the 'choice' was between a male career pattern or the 'mommy' track, there being no option for 'part-time with ambition', and secondly, that the culture 'wasn't ready' for considering men taking up this option.

Eileen believed in equality, and it was this belief that led her to oppose the idea of a 'mommy track' (which offered women flexibility but compelled them to surrender ambition). Eileen was ambitious; she like this about herself and so did Jim. What she wanted instead of a 'mommy track' was an array of possible timetables that allowed women and men alike to combine ambition and the family (p.97).

Hochschild argued that it was not just the fear of the 'mommy track' that was putting off more employees from taking up flexible working options, but also that the social worlds of work and home were reversing. She proposed that family time was being imbued with the 'cult of efficiency primarily associated with the workplace' (p.45), whilst work time was increasingly linked with the social, community aspects of a 'balanced' life. Hochschild (1997: p.221) concluded that, as a result of an increasing pressure to lead a more work-centred life, women were using strategies to avoid the 'time bind'. These included 'emotional asceticism' (minimizing how much care a child really 'needed', to allow for leaving children home alone), and 'detaching their own identities from what they might previously have defined as being part of a 'good parent'' (accounting for outsourcing childcare and family services, through for example summer camps and buying-in meals).

2.4.2 Challenges to 'work-life balance'

Fleetwood (2007b) traces the shift in the framing of flexible working in public and policy discourse from flexible labour markets through discourses of flexible firms and workers through to family-friendly flexible working and on to work-life balance discourses. He argues this illustrates a shift from an association with 'flexploitation' and employee-

unfriendly (employer-friendly) practices to a discourse of work-life balance suggesting a largely positive focus on employee-friendly practices. He proposes that:

The discourses of WLB have increased markedly because they have been useful in legitimizing the employee-unfriendly working practices central to neoliberalism: they have acted as a Trojan Horse. The discourses of WLB conceal, while promoting, the now 'rehabilitated' discourses of flexibility. Employee-unfriendly working practices remain, but are veiled by the mask of WLB discourses with their employee-friendly connotations (p.396).

He points for example (p.397) to New Labour's key work-life balance 'right to request and the duty to consider flexible working' policy, suggesting this is loaded in favour of businesses, whilst 'maintaining a veneer of symmetry' (p.397). Not only are businesses able to turn requests down if 'not compatible with the nature of the business' (p.397), but the framing of this policy means on taking up such a 'right' employees often feel they owe their employer. This latter point is also suggested by Kelliher and Anderson (2010) who report a paradox in their findings that flexible workers (both reduced hours and remote working) were working more intensively than they had done before. They suggest (p.99) that this 'increased effort' was in part due to a 'sense of obligation' to their employer for permitting them to work flexibly.

Smithson and Stokoe (2005) drew upon data with male and female participants aged 25-55, from interviews and focus groups with 40 employees in a banking organisation and 50 interviews with accountants from a number of accountancy firms. In this exploration of discourses of work-life balance and flexible working, the authors conclude that:

Masking or minimising gender differences within gender-neutral language does not, as a strategy appear to be working as a means for advancing gender equality. In other words, men do not normally 'do' flexible working and work-life balance, any more than they did family-friendly working (p.164).

Extracts from their data indicate that while work-life balance and flexible working are often associated with individual choice and diversity of needs, the assumption made is that the category of individual most likely to 'choose' or need work-life balance is women with children, particularly young children, and that the 'choice' made is usually working part-time. One male respondent (p.155), emphasises the 'need to have regard for the different mixes of characters of people you've got', but then goes on to relegate the 'chunk' looking for work-life balance to the 'middle', while those at the 'top' will be 'the sorts of people who work out what's right for them...and who're prepared to put in the extra mile'. The

authors' interpretation is that the 'predicates of the category 'professional' therefore include not having a work-life balance, and putting in the 'extra mile' (p.155). These findings are echoed in other studies – for example, Atkinson and Hall (2009), regarding the gendered nature of the perceptual barrier, and Sheridan (2004), regarding the incompatibility of work-life balance with the long hours culture associated with the intensification of work. Gregory and Milner's (2011b) research with fathers in France and the UK similarly found gendered perceptions of work-life balance to be a factor constraining fathers from taking up measures. They proposed that fathers were more likely to take them up if specifically focused on them as fathers or if universal availability was emphasized (for example, applying to a whole team), rather than referring to parental responsibilities (perceptions of which remained gendered). Otherwise, they would make use of informal flexibility, where they could.

The conceptualisation of work-life balance' is also contested - for example, the fact that this constructs 'work' and 'life' as two separate spheres. It is suggested that with today's technologies and workers being ever available, these boundaries are inevitably blurring. Gambles et al (2006) argue that 'balance' is a 'myth', due to un-surmountable constraints and pressures. Although there is notionally a 'choice', individuals are faced with contradictory discourses of 'work commitment' and 'work-life balance' and the expectation is to do both. This can mean 'work-life balance' adds pressure rather than reduces it (Ford and Collinson, 2011, Lewis et al., 2007b). Some argue for shifting to 'integration', 'articulation' or 'harmonization' (see Gregory and Milner, 2009). Grady and McCarthy (2008) contend that 'balance' focuses attention on conflict and time squeeze and that too little attention has been paid to possible positive spill-over between work and life. In their Irish study with 18 full-time working professional mothers in mid-career (and thus with a child between aged 9 and 17, so particularly pertinent to this research), they use 'integration'. They argue that whilst 70 percent of their participants were holding themselves back from promotion, on the grounds of the costs to their time outweighing the benefits, they achieved satisfaction from managing to merge work and caring in their lives. They also, however, point to mid-career being a time for reflection and re-consideration of priorities (referencing Hall, 1986). They propose that their participants, in looking ahead, were reconsidering what career 'success' meant to them, in the context of shifting priorities regarding the meaning of life. They were placing priority on being there for their children through and beyond secondary school, developing skills and knowledge for the future, anticipating needing time for ageing parents, and importantly, now that managing work and caring was getting easier, they emphasized needing to incorporate time for selves.

A key challenge has been that ‘work-life balance’ is not attainable without changing organisational cultures. However, studies in this section (for example Fleetwood, 2007a, Smithson and Stokoe, 2005), in keeping with studies reviewed on part-time working, suggest that work-life balance policies do not appear to be changing organisational cultures. These can therefore still be employee-unfriendly or marginalise part-time workers, and associations remain gendered. It is worth noting that this was acknowledged by government and in 2011, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills conducted a Consultation on Modern Workplaces, a major part of this focusing on flexible working. As a result they committed to extending the right to request flexible working to all employees, and as of 30 June 2014¹⁵, it has indeed been opened up. However, they noted in their proposals that stimulating cultural change in order to make flexible working practices the norm would require non-legislative measures too.

Hochschild (1997) argued for a ‘time revolution’, requiring collective action to reform the culture of time within organisations, in order to make time for caring and relationships. Her vision involves men and women working less and having more control over their time. Recently, Fraser (2013) has traced the ‘Fortunes of Feminism’ via two decades of her feminist essays. She proposes a successor to socialist feminism in the form of a ‘Universal Caregiver Model’, whereby work is set up to accommodate caregiving, including not just support for childcare services, but everyone working a shorter week. Her vision is for:

A form of life that decenters waged work and valorises uncommodified activities, including, but not only, carework. Now performed largely by women, such activities should become valued components of a good life for everyone (p.226).

The final section will turn to literature on mothering older children, to consider what might be pertinent to the sustaining of part-time working.

2.5 Mothering older children (and sustaining part-time working)

Having reviewed the literature on mothering identity, combining work and motherhood, part-time working and work-life-balance, the need to ‘be there’ and associated ‘choice’ to work part-time are strongly focused on mothers of *young* children. As referenced in the introduction of this thesis, the majority of research on work and motherhood focuses on mothers of pre-school children or children under 12. Few studies concentrate specifically on the experiences of mothers of *older* children and how they manage work and home. This part of the chapter turns to drawing together strands of literature that look at mothering older children and may be relevant to why some mothers are sustaining part-

¹⁵ The Flexible Working Regulations 2014.

time working through this phase. Section 2.5.1 outlines the theme of needing to 'be there' but also to 'let go' that arises as a new contradiction in the context of mothering adolescents. This explores potential positives and negatives relating to maternal presence in the home. Section 2.5.2 looks briefly at the limited literature on older children's perspectives on mothers working. The final section turns to potential impacts on children and mothers of work pressure or overload, but hints of some potential positive spill over. Again, this literature is limited compared to that on impacts on young children (see Good Childhood Inquiry 2007).

2.5.1 The contradiction between needing to 'be there' and 'letting go'

While much of Garey's (1999) 'Weaving work and motherhood' takes a cross-sectional approach to her analysis of interviews with thirty-seven mothers working in US hospitals, Chapter 7 focuses on the different sequencing patterns emerging from the life histories. The mothers had children of varying ages, and seven had a youngest child over eighteen. Amongst those still with younger children, the 'plan' was suggested to be quite vague, with Garey illustrating their strong need to 'be there' whilst their children are young and an intention amongst those working part-time to increase their hours when the children are 'older' (p.186). Two of the main stories were from women who had worked part-time until their children left home, although when they talked about the incompatibility of their current full-time jobs with caring, they were referring to caring for young children. Garey distinguishes between planned, situational (such as resources or opportunities) and involuntary (such as changes instigated by divorce) modes of sequencing mothers moved between over time. A single trajectory or 'career-model' is described as foreign to most of her participants. She identifies a key transition intersecting with other life opportunities and situations as being the need to prepare children for leaving home:

If our culture has defined achieving autonomy as one of the central tasks of childhood, then the work of mothering includes fostering self-reliance by 'letting go' of children at developmentally appropriate, age-appropriate, and socially appropriate times (p.187).

Her research suggested that moving to the 'letting go' stage was potentially a period in which part-time mothers might increase their hours at work – although this depended on other contextual factors and how these intersected with this transition period.

In their Swedish study of twenty-four working mothers of children of varying ages, Elvin-Novak and Thommson (2001) suggested there was a shift from physical to emotional accessibility associated with mothering older children, and that being able to support an adolescent emotionally required a close relationship. In both these qualitative studies

(Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson, 2001, Garey, 1999), having a close relationship was considered crucial to 'good' mothering and being able to 'let go'. For example, knowing their mother was there for them was considered important for confidence, and a close relationship was linked to open communication or being in tune so the mother could help even if the adolescent was reticent about opening up.

These findings echo the core tenets of Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969). The original theory focused primarily on the importance of attachment between a mother and her infant. However Bowlby argued (p.207) that attachment continues as an influential strand throughout a child's life. Bowlby (1988) later distinguished between attachment and dependency in adolescence, contending that secure attachment is a necessary pre-requisite to an adolescent venturing out from his/her secure home to explore and experiment with independence. This theorising is considered to have been influential in the body of research on understanding links between the parent-child relationship and a child's wellbeing (O'Connor and Scott, 2007).

At the same time as needing to let go, however, parents are faced with the discourse of 'problem' teenage behaviour, such as risk-taking, anti-social behaviour and academic failure, potentially linked to *lack* of parental monitoring and control. A significant strand of developmental and clinical psychology has investigated and theorised the potential links and causes. Key contributions include Dishion and McMahon (1998) whose theories positioned parental monitoring as a key construct in development and prevention research (see also Ary et al., 1999). Another major contribution comes from Stattin and Kerr's (2000) Swedish study of 14 year-olds that questioned long-held assumptions regarding the way in which parental monitoring had been operationalised and linked to problem behaviour. They argued that parental knowledge (this being the way in which monitoring was generally operationalised) was more to do with adolescent self-disclosure than active adult surveillance. Other psychologists (for example Fletcher et al., 2004, Soenens et al., 2006) have built on this theorising, for example by examining ways in which self-disclosure may be associated with parenting style through creating a warm relationship in which self-disclosure is encouraged. They have also, however, drawn out causal links between a firmer style of parenting (control and active monitoring) and what is regarded to be less problematic behaviour in adolescent children.

While these academic debates continue unresolved, the *potential* link between limited parental knowledge/monitoring/control and problem adolescent behaviour may be impacting on mothers' sustaining their part-time working. A recent study pertinent to this is Lewis et al's (2007a) UK research on dependence and independence, where they drew

on interviews with twenty-six two-parent families (interviewing the mother, father and one child aged 12-16 all separately). The research centred on *perceptions* of risk, from both the parents' and child's perspectives. Extracts are used to illustrate the tensions the authors detected between 'letting go' and attempting to protect their children from risks through control. As one respondent put it 'you've got to give them freedom, but God it's hard' (p.78). All twenty-six mothers worked, seventeen of them part-time. The authors contend (p. 88) that 'the strength of mothers' perceptions about risk had played a major part in determining their hours and mode of employment'. They point to the apparent paradox between the risks the mothers predominantly worried about being located away from home (such as stranger danger, running with the wrong crowd), and their continuing need to 'be there'. They suggest the part-time working mothers made sense of the emphasis they placed on being there after school whenever they could by linking 'being there' with being better able to 'pick up on' issues and with knowing the child better, which they positioned as vital to negotiations regarding independence. The authors found that those with older children worried more, because they were out of the home more.

2.5.2 Older children's perspectives of mothers working

While research on perceptions of parental work from children's perspectives is fairly limited, the research I have reviewed (Christensen, 2002, Galinsky, 1999, Lewis et al., 2008, Ridge, 2007) is consistent in suggesting that it is not generally problematic for older children to spend some time alone at home after school. The children in Ridge's (2007) qualitative study were aged 8-14, from low-income, lone mother families. She reported that time alone for the older children in her study:

... can be quality time and it can also build confidence through trust and responsibility. This was reflected in the older children's accounts which highlighted the positive effects of time away from parental gaze and the freedom to organise their home life as they would like it (p.404).

Christensen's (2002) intensive ethnography of seventy children and survey with 489 children explored the 'qualities of time' during the transition to secondary school in Northern England. The author contends that from a child's perspective the way in which 'family time' is conceptualised and valued differs markedly from the notion of 'quality family time' as intense, attentive, togetherness. For example, her participants included in this and placed significant value on non-eventful routine, someone being there for you if you need them, having a say over their time, and having some peace and quiet. The ethnographic perspective allowed Christensen to situate 'family time' in children's lives – that is time away from school and friends.

Around half of Lewis et al's (2008) fifty 14-15 year olds when prompted agreed they would welcome shorter parental working hours, although for the most part it was their father's hours that they would like to shorten. In a quantitative study¹⁶ (MacGill, 2009), only three out of 203 adolescents (aged 12-19) with full-time working mothers agreed strongly that 'family life suffers when the woman works full-time', with 15 percent of these agreeing overall (agree/agree strongly). Agreement was higher amongst younger teenagers aged 12-15 than older teenagers 16-19 (30% compared to 17%), but if the young teenager's mother worked full-time the agreement was considerably lower at 19 percent. These findings suggest that those with full-time working mothers do not for the most part agree they suffer as a result of their mother working, although other teenagers may have some concerns about the prospect. Lewis et al (2008) refer to repeated mentions of getting 'used to' being on their own and accepting their circumstances. They note that some participants stated that they would not have been happy a few years earlier. Using logistic regression, MacGill (2009) found having a mother who worked part-time was a moderate predictor of disagreement to the statement 'people should work hard even if it interferes with the rest of your life'. This perhaps indicates that those with part-time working mothers appreciate that their mother is working less than full-time, but this would need further investigation.

2.5.3 Impacts of parental work on adolescent wellbeing

Studies in the previous section suggested that maternal absence for some of the time after school is not generally problematic for secondary school children (Galinsky, 1999, Lewis et al, 2008, Ridge, 2007). However, these studies indicated that some children had concerns regarding their working parents' wellbeing and the negative effects stress or overtiredness could have on their relationship with them.

Research on the impact of parental work on child wellbeing is mostly focused on young children, with little research on the impact on older children, particularly in the UK (Good Childhood Inquiry, 2007). Crouter et al (1999), in a US study with 190 dual-earner families, investigated parental work pressure and links with psychological adjustment of their adolescent children. They concluded that work pressure was not directly correlated with child wellbeing, but detected a number of indirect associations where high levels of overload were linked to high levels of conflict, which in turn were linked to a modest negative effect on adolescent wellbeing. Sallinen et al (2004) drew on data from two Finnish studies, the first with both parents and one child (n=77) and the second with 14

¹⁶ Secondary analysis of The Young People's Social Attitudes Survey, an offshoot of the British Social Attitudes Survey, carried out in 2003 (n=520 of which 203 had full-time working mothers, 182 part-time working mothers and 135 stay-at-home mothers).

year-old adolescents (n=146). Connections between parents' negative work experiences and their children's wellbeing were made both directly and indirectly. They contend that adolescents perceived their parents to be less responsive and less encouraging when tired or stressed from work and this could lead to less autonomy granting and more conflicts. This was reflected in the adolescent's mood, but might show up differently in girls and boys – girls being more likely to internalise problems and suffer from depression and lack of self-esteem, and boys more likely to externalise problems, shown up potentially in the link found between fathers' negative work experiences and their sons' negative attitudes to school. Sallinen et al also point to positive spillover found, for example, in the connections between mothers' job motivation and their child's positive attitudes to school. Positive associations, they note, are often forgotten in research on work spillover, although Galinsky (1999) too draws attention to them.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has turned attention to working in part-time employment. It has highlighted the different interpretations of current organisational discourses of flexibility, consumption and individualisation for worker identity (for example, Bauman, 1998, Sennett, 1998). These and the notion of work commitment and orientation, where again Hakim (2004) and her critics have been central to debates, will be important references for understanding the framing of part-time working, how that might impact on worker identities, and how women might potentially reframe or resist discourses. The literature points to the highly gendered nature of part-time working and the issue of hours worked being a proxy for commitment thereby positioning 'part-timers' as less than 'ideal' and inappropriate for senior roles (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). Thus, even when negotiated at professional/higher levels, part-time working women may be experiencing marginalisation (Edwards and Robinson, 2001, Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010). Quantitative research has indicated that many part-time workers, including those higher educated, are working below their potential (Grant et al., 2005) and longitudinal analysis has identified two 'tracks', one described as a short-term support for a full-time career and the other as a trap or dead end (Connolly and Gregory, 2010). A qualitative perspective exploring reasons for and experiences of *sustaining* part-time working at higher/professional levels is missing.

Drawing on work-life balance literature, with its emphasis on a long hours working culture and the resulting time-squeeze and lack of time for caring and relationships (Hochschild, 1997) potentially hints at what might be putting women off resuming a full-time career focus. However, despite a shift within organisations to a discourse of 'work-

life balance' with its suggestion of being open to all, underneath things may not have changed very much, which again points to the gendering and marginalisation of those who have a need for a 'work-life balance' (i.e. part-time working mothers of young children) (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005, Fleetwood, 2007b). Separately, literature on mothering adolescents indicates the need to 'be there', perhaps due to concerns regarding 'problem' teenage behavior or bad influences (Lewis et al., 2007a), but also the contradictory need to 'let go' (Garey, 1999). However, 'letting go' may require a close relationship (Elvin-Novak and Thomsson, 2001) and this may be perceived to require presence, or lack of stress. Again, there are hints here at reasons for sustaining part-time working, but these would require substantiating.

Having reviewed the literature on mothering and working part-time and highlighted the gap in terms of a life-stage perspective on sustained part-time working and mothering older children, the next chapter will turn to the development of a theoretical framework within which to explore mother-worker identities.

Chapter 3

A dialogic perspective on dialectics and stories

3.1 Introduction

This chapter recounts engaging with a dialogic perspective on dialectics and stories. The interest in dialogism that has guided this theoretical framework began with considering dialectical theory to examine how women manage competing, potentially contradictory mother and worker identities. This entailed drawing on Johnston and Swanson's (2007) use of dialectical theory in investigating the construction of worker-mother identities with mothers of pre-school children - applying this to mothers of older children who had worked part-time since their children were young. *Reframing* was of interest, since Johnston and Swanson identified it as the most satisfactory and long-lasting response to the tension, and found part-time working mothers the most likely to adopt it. This was the theoretical focus in the pilot study (MacGill, 2010). Attempting to apply their approach highlighted its seeming over-simplification and inconsistencies. This prompted a deeper investigation, tracing the theory's development and roots in dialogism via Baxter (1996, 2004), to Bakhtin (1981, 1986). Section 3.2 describes this theorising on dialectics, how it sits within dialogism's vision of the world and how it was drawn on to guide this research.

The story continues in 3.3 with the development of a dialogic perspective on storied selves. The pilot study had taken a social constructionist stance, but engaging with Bakhtin revealed dialogism's distinctive take within social constructivism on how we understand our world and our selves within it - and this seemed to resonate with the particular aims and considerations of this research. Following Johnston and Swanson's (2007) application of dialectical theory in the pilot study had fragmented the life stories into themes relating to the use of strategies such as *reframing*. A dialogic narrative approach to sense making would place an emphasis on the construction of the stories. This resonated with the objective of understanding the experiences of *sustained* part-time working, and would enable the focus on dialectics to retain its context within a time/space of an individual's story. Furthermore, dialogism stressed the complex relational and cultural matrix of competing pulls within which the self is storied, together with a sense of answerability and agency. This seemed to provide a promising approach to considering sense making in relation to sustained part-time working and motherhood. Comparisons and distinctions between a dialogic approach and other approaches to narrating storied selves are drawn in 3.3.2. Section 3.3.3 discusses the influence of the work of sociologist Arthur Frank (in particular, 1995, 2010), on the development of a dialogical perspective on stories. This was particularly useful as a bridge between theory and methods.

3.2 Dialectical theory: engaging with dialogism

Baxter's (1990) early work on managing dialectic contradictions in relationships (for example the dialectic of closeness/distance), identified four potential responses to easing the tension between the two: *selection*, whereby one option is made dominant to the exclusion of the other; *separation*, where the interdependence is denied and the options are separated temporally or topically; *neutralisation*, which is typified by dilution and compromise; and *reframing*, which 'unlike the first three categories, (is) characterized by a perceptual transformation of the elements along different dimensions of meaning such that the two contrasts are no longer regarded as opposites' (Baxter, 1990: p.73). Johnston and Swanson (2007) applied this dialectical theory in investigating tension between mother-worker identities with US mothers of pre-school children. Their analysis identified that stay-at-home mothers (n=39) adopted a *selection* strategy, with just over a quarter subjugating their work identity to do so. *Separation* was used by just five of the ninety-eight mothers, all full-time workers, and all primarily driven by their worker identity, with relatively lower adherence to intensive mothering expectations. The low usage here potentially reflects the high level of interdependence for this particular contradiction – *separation* was the most common response in Baxter's relationship research.

The majority of full-time working mothers attempted to *neutralise* the tension, by for example altering work schedules or working evenings to accommodate seeing their children. But they did not adapt work goals and are described as perceiving their worker identity 'to be in constant conflict with their mother role', fulfilling neither satisfactorily (p.454). A smaller proportion of part-time working mothers employed *neutralisation* by prioritising motherhood over employment, which they positioned as secondary. However, they represented the outcome as modifying and compromising both intensive mothering and career expectations. The majority of part-time working mothers (72%: n=21) and thirty percent (n=9) of full-time working mothers used *reframing*, mostly by integrating working into 'good' mothering, for example by suggesting time away made them more patient and by reframing accessibility from quantity of time to quality time. Johnston and Swanson (2007) associated *reframing* with being longer-lasting and more satisfactory (as Baxter, 1990, had also done), and emphasised the importance of identifying it as the primary response amongst part-time working mothers, in light of previous research (Johnston and Swanson, 2006) finding part-time working mothers to be happier.

Following her initial thinking on dialectics, Baxter began to draw progressively on dialogism as theorised by Bakhtin (1981). However, whilst Johnston and Swanson (2007)

appeared to employ Bakhtin's thinking, both by quoting him a number of times directly (p.449; p.457) and by referencing Baxter's later work where dialogism had become central, they contradicted the dialogic approach in several fundamental ways. The following section introduces some of the core concepts associated with dialogism and the subsequent section engages more fully with Baxter's (1996, 2004) later work, illustrating where Johnston and Swanson's (2007) analysis is at variance.

3.2.1 Introducing Bakhtin and dialogism

Summing up Bakhtin is not easy. His work spans half a century from the 1920's until his death in 1975¹⁷. He is probably best known for his work on the novel and his conceptualisation of language. Michael Holquist, translator, editor and scholar of Bakhtin's work provides the following introduction, which captures how someone who might principally be seen as a theoretician of language and authority on novels is also described as a philosophical anthropologist and social theorist (see for example Todorov, 1984):

At the heart of everything Bakhtin ever did – from what we know of his very earliest (lost) manuscripts to the very latest (still unpublished) work – is a highly distinctive concept of language. The conception has as its enabling a priori an almost Manichean sense of opposition and struggle at the heart of existence, a ceaseless battle between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart, and centripetal forces that strive to make things cohere. This Zoroastrian clash is present in culture as well as nature, and in the specificity of individual consciousness; it is at work in the even greater particularity of individual utterances. The most complete and complex reflection of these forces is found in human language (Holquist, 1981b: p.xviii).

This quote places opposition and struggle at the centre of Bakhtin's conception of existence. However, the '*ceaseless* battle' between centripetal and centrifugal forces illustrates a fundamental difference between dialogism and Johnston and Swanson's (2007) employment of Baxter's dialectical theory. Rather than a Hegelian conception of dialectics, following a progression from thesis to antithesis to synthesis, Baxter's relational dialectics, framed in dialogism, sees 'the interplay of contradictory forces (as) a process of ongoing flux' (Baxter, 2004). Bakhtin was highly critical of Hegelian dialectics (Holquist, 1990) and places great emphasis on openness and unfinishedness (Holquist, 1986, Gardiner and Bell, 1998, Todorov, 1984). Johnston and Swanson (2007), however, suggest that rather than a temporary reprieve, 'what (part-time working mothers) may be

¹⁷ Although much of his work, particularly the more philosophical, was delayed for decades in being published in the West.

securing is a transcendent point off the dialectical continuum where they can be both at-home and employed' (p.457). They portray part-time working mothers' *reframing* of their worker identity making them a better mother as a 'resolution' of the contradiction, whereas for Baxter and Bakhtin there is no resolution.

Looking back, dialectics has included variations that focus on resolution and synthesis (such as Socrates and Plato) and those that focus on a continual cycle and state of flux (such as the Yin and Yang in Taoism) (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). This framework took as its starting point the perspective that *reframing* is unlikely to be a one-off 'resolution' of the tension, but rather is likely to require constant revisiting. I will later draw on my data to argue that this is in part due to the constantly changing contexts in which both mothering and working are played out, and secondly due to the complexity of contradictions that women are dealing with. The pilot study (MacGill 2010) had indicated that the altering conditions and matrix of tensions to negotiate result in potentially multiple, fluid pressures, rising up and retreating at different points along the dialectic continua. In this scenario, categorising women as having implemented a singular praxis pattern (such as *reframing* or *neutralisation*) to 'resolve' a singular, binary tension between mothering and work identities seemed to be an oversimplification.

Bakhtin's (1981) vision of the social world is one characterized by a multitude of contradictions, all in a state of flux, and hence the importance he places on historical and social context:

Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given bodily form. These 'languages' of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying 'languages' (Bakhtin, 1981: p.291).

'Heteroglossia' is 'the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text' (Holquist, 1981a: p.428). It is the set of unique, *contextual* conditions (social, historical, political, geographical etc) that collide as centrifugal and centripetal forces at the specific time and place of an utterance. Bakhtin's critique of Hegelian dialectics (see Bakhtin, 1986: p.147) centred on them ignoring 'heteroglossia' and insisting on finalising and systemising.

3.2.2 Reconsidering dialectical theory through a dialogic lens

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) came on to embrace this ‘unfinalizable multivocality’ in the development of their dialectical theory. They identified three frequently occurring dialectics in the literature on relationships: closeness/distance, certainty/uncertainty, openness/closedness. They suggested that a monologic approach reified what had traditionally been considered the ‘positives’ of closeness, certainty, and openness in relationships, whilst a dualistic approach revealed that in some cases the ‘negative’ lead to a better functioning relationship and individuals and relationships varied in their requirements for positives/negatives. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) proposed that both arguments ignored the simultaneous interplay between the centripetal forces of unity and the centrifugal forces of division, and the fact that the ‘both/and-ness’ of these dialectics was negotiated on an on-going basis. To them, dualism conceptualised opposites as predominantly static and isolated, or ‘either/or’ in nature, whereas dialogism envisaged a *dynamic interaction* that was ‘both/and’ in nature (1996: p.10).

In re-examining data through a dialogic lens, they came to appreciate a ‘cacophony’ of oppositions (see for example, 1996: p.98) – the result of each pole having ‘radiants’ of meaning, that differed qualitatively, dependent on a relationship’s changing ‘chronotopes’. Bakhtin’s (1981: p.84) concept of ‘chronotope’ or literally ‘time/space’ conceptualised ‘time’ and ‘space’ as utterly interdependent and inseparable (see also Holquist, 1981a: p.425/6).

Conceptualising mother-worker identities in a dialectical relationship seemed to offer a possible way out of the stalemate of considering them as dichotomous and thus always in conflict with each other, as Johnston and Swanson (2007) had noted. It also had potential to avoid simply positioning part-time working mothers as having a weaker attachment to both ‘home-centred’ and ‘careerist’ on Hakim’s (2004) dualistic spectrum. From a feminist perspective, this was promising. Applying Baxter’s (1990) theory seemed to provide an opportunity to go beyond simply describing the identities as simultaneous and intersecting, as for example with intersectionality (Collins, 2000, Crenshaw, 1989), to incorporating a conceptualisation of responses to tension at the intersection. In the pilot study, attempting to apply Baxter’s (1990) dialectical theory in the way that Johnston and Swanson (2007) had done, had illustrated the over-simplicity of ‘categorising’ mothers as having used a particular strategy to attempt to release a singular, static tension between mothering and working. It also questioned the proposal that *reframing* could resolve the tension – rather indicating *reframing* would require on-going ideological work, in agreement with Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) redefinition. Furthermore, in their

study amongst mothers of pre-school children, the authors were focused on the work-home status decision, whereas this research was interested in the impact of *sustained* part-time working over the course of working part-time and bringing up their children. Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) embracing of Bakhtin's emphasis on 'unfinalizable multivocality' made more sense of the *complexity* inherent in the matrix of inter-related tensions in and between working and mothering, and pointed to the importance of appreciating the *context* within which the tension was being managed, and the *shifting* conditions dependent on time/space.

The challenge was going to be how to capture this theoretical framing in all its complexity, fluidity and messiness and apply it to the research methodology. Working this out was an iterative process. What became crucial was an increasing appreciation of dialogism's particular position within social constructivism regarding the conceptualisation of a storied self. As this developed theoretically and subsequently methodologically, I came to appreciate how the theories of dialectics and stories could work well together – narratives providing the context in a particular time/space for situating a focus on the dialectic, and vice versa, an examination of the response to dialectic tension adding nuance to understanding the work of the story.

3.3 Dialogism and storied selves

Before moving on to discuss storied selves and identities, it seems pertinent to continue with the story of dialogism and pin down its core concepts. Bakhtin, as we have heard, was critical of systems and closure, and as such, would not have referred to his work as a theory, which suggests a complete, and finalised work - he did, however, develop a number of inter-connected concepts, several of which have ontological and epistemological implications (Holquist, 1990). His contemplation on 'how we know' creates a distinctive depiction of how we understand our world and linked to this, how we understand our selves within that world.

3.3.1 Understanding our selves: according to dialogism

As will have become apparent, according to dialogism, it is *through* dialogue that the social world is constructed. This is in contrast to an essentialist point of view where communication is 'an instrumental activity of the monadic self' (Baxter, 2004: p.3) – or where in other words, communication is used to transmit one's pre-formed thoughts and beliefs persuasively to another. Dialogism is therefore positioned within the constructivist fold. With his focus on language, Bakhtin centred social life in the 'utterance'. This built on Saussure's concept of 'parole' (the speech act as opposed to his concept of 'langue' or

linguistics), 'but where utterance is made specifically social, historical, concrete and dialogized' (Holquist, 1981a: p.433). In the utterance, we see the individual confronting centripetal and centrifugal forces, in the context of 'heteroglossia':

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity (Bakhtin, 1981: p.272).

Furthermore, whilst the utterance is a unique chronotopic (time/space) interaction of forces, it is also a link in a chain, both to past and future dialogues:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it – it does not approach the object from the sidelines (Bakhtin, 1981: p.276/7).

But the utterance is related not only to preceding, but also to subsequent links in the chain of speech communion... As we know, the role of the others for whom the utterance is constructed is extremely great. We have already said that the role of these others, for whom my thought becomes actual thought for the first time (and thus also for my own self as well) is not that of passive listeners, but of active participants in speech communication. From the very beginning, the speaker expects a response from them, an active responsive understanding. The entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of encountering this response (Bakhtin, 1986: p.94).

In the utterance, an individual is therefore drawing on past dialogue and discourse absorbed over time, as well as responding to whatever has just been said by another person. Bakhtin's notion of 'speech genres' and the different levels at which they work regarding the assimilation of language also applies to the internalisation of discourse and ideology (in Russian this is a semiotic idea-system, rather than being politically oriented (Holquist, 1981a: p.429)). 'Speech genres' are collectively recognisable and relatively stable (Bakhtin, 1986), but when drawn on in producing an utterance, they reflect a degree of individuality, because they emanate from a chronotopic (specific to a time/space) situated context which is unique (Burkitt, 1998). Burkitt suggests that

'speech genres' are equivalent to the term 'discourse' as used generally in contemporary social science. He however distinguishes between the focus in discourse analysis on discourse itself and its structuring of practice, and Bakhtin's conceptualisation of 'speech genres' where, significantly, 'the author is not simply a construct of the a priori discourse, a position within its already situated frame – but a person within networks of communicative relationships who brings speech genres to life through his or her utterances' (Burkitt, 1998: p.164/5).

Simultaneously, the individual is anticipating the immediate subsequent response from the person being addressed, and potentially that of what Bakhtin called the 'superaddressee' – 'whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed' (Bakhtin, 1986: p.126). Bell (1998: p.53) suggests that 'taking into account the words of others is the principal phenomenological requirement of dialogic interaction'. Bakhtin's theorising on ethics and answerability began in his early essays (Bakhtin, 1990: written in 1920's). To him, ethics were not a matter of rules (Morson and Emerson, 1989). Nielsen (1998: p.214) captures his perspective as:

...how should I act, not because of the rules or the expectation of my duty (as with Kant), but how should I act given the imaginary but not fictional subjectivity of another who can answer me back – however different that subjectivity might be from my own.

So, it is in the utterance that an individual takes on *and makes sense of* a multiplicity of centripetal and centrifugal forces in the context of specific, social and historical conditions or 'heteroglossia'. We make sense of our existence by trying to define our specific place in it. We do so by drawing on collectively recognised 'speech genres' (or discourses) and taking into account how another might answer back, how we should act towards them. Bell (1998: p.60) suggests that whilst this echoes Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism, the 'taking into account' in dialogism is 'broader and more open to the possibility of our critical understanding of the other', that is an individual does not have to agree. In both drawing from the past and imagining the future, the individual is structured, framed, limited even by the 'speech genres' he or she has experienced - but importantly there is also a notion of individuality, of responsibility and of agency, as well as a sense of continually changing contexts, whereby one is not 'stuck', framed by a static structure. The focus is on language, but it is on the communicative aspect of language - on language as practice. It is situated, dialogised, emanating from the situation. For many poststructuralist and postmodernist perspectives, from Foucault to Derrida, the subject is fragmented or even killed off (Puigvert, 2003, Gardiner and Bell, 1998), and the detachment of discourse and text from its fundamental role in the activity of

communication has been described as resulting in an 'anti-humanist' feel (Burkitt, 1998). With dialogism, the subject has not been erased. On the other hand, Holquist (1990) has suggested that those who overemphasise Bakhtin's moral privileging of the other can overlook the weight given to the structuring power of social forces which he refers to as sometimes verging on '(but not quite)' determinism (p.38). This can potentially inflate the impression of agency.

Comparisons have been drawn between Bakhtin and Bourdieu in their attempts to account for structure *and* agency, together with their more practical and embodied approach to language compared to structuralists and poststructuralists (Burkitt, 1998, Fraser, 2013). Burkitt (1998: p.165) refers to the way different 'speech genres' have varying degrees of flexibility and opportunity for creativity and that this fluidity of structure is similar to that found in Bourdieu's (1990b) 'generative schemes or structures'¹⁸. He draws out the way in which Bakhtin envisaged people absorbed and mastered different 'speech genres', dependent on their social location and lived experiences, referencing the way these resonated with Bourdieu's (1990a) concepts of 'habitus' or dispositions, and 'field' or their 'feel for the game'.

From a dialogic perspective, the subject is not erased, although it is de-centred (Smith and Sparkes, 2008, Gardiner and Bell, 1998). Significantly, Bakhtin viewed the self as the relation between self and other, and therefore, 'the very capacity to have consciousness is based on otherness...in dialogism consciousness is otherness' (Holquist, 1990: p.18). Bakhtin (1986: p.126) makes reference to the other being real, imagined, historical or generalised. Constructing ourselves in relation to others is core to symbolic interactionist thought. Mead (1934) conceptualises this relational construction as the self constructing multiple selves in relation to multiple others or social systems (the 'generalized other'). Sampson (1993) draws parallels between Bakhtin and Mead in terms of the central role they ascribe to the 'other' in constituting the self, and the distinction created between the 'I' and the 'me'. But for Bakhtin, it is not just a self being constructed *in relation to* his or her social environment. Rather, it is the relation itself. Existence is *liminal*, located on the boundary between two consciousnesses (Holquist, 1990, Sampson, 1993). Whilst Mead gave psychology a social context, Shotter and Billig (1998) describe a Bakhtinian psychology as shifting the focus from inside the minds of individuals and into the dialogues between them (p.13). They describe this as a move towards a 'social, social psychology' (p.14).

¹⁸ 'A form of action or speech that has a structure within it, but one that is remodelled in each act or speech act' (Burkitt, 1998: p.165).

The self, therefore, is very much a social relational entity. The relationship with the other can be conceptualised using Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) 'both-and' notion, also referred to as 'alterity' (see for example Gardiner and Bell, 1998) – the self and other being both the same and different, both connected and separated. The self is shared or has a 'transgredient' quality – that is rather than being contained within, as per an ingredient, it lies between – and requires the other to complete itself (Nielsen, 1998, Sampson, 1993, Todorov, 1984). The self contains the imaginary position of others as alternative perspectives on both itself and the world (Hermans, 2001). Bakhtin argues that one can only fully understand oneself or the world from a position of 'outsidedness': 'In order to forge a self, I must do so from outside. In other words, I author myself' (Holquist, 1990: p.28) and similarly: 'In the realm of culture, outsidedness is the most powerful factor in understanding' (Bakhtin, 1986: p.7). It is only from this extralocality that one can share the other's 'surplus of seeing' about oneself, utilising one's power of imagination to construe the self as self-other (Gardiner and Bell, 1998).

So, the self as self/other in dialogism is core to how we understand who we are and the world we live in, but as touched on earlier, it is also pivotal to the concept of 'responsive understanding' – or in other words, the ethics of understanding the answer appropriate to the situation, which in some cases may be what we judge to be 'good' or 'right'. Bakhtin proposes that 'understanding comes only to fruition in the response – understanding and response are dialectically merged and condition one another, one is impossible without the other' (1981: p.282). Nielsen (1998: p.224) contends that Bakhtin is drawing on Hermann Cohen's neo-Kantian perspective whereby the concept of ethics is only possible if it is connected to one's 'fellowman'. It is also important to note that it is through the self as self/other that we also come to understand what we are not, what we do not believe and what we do not see as 'true' or 'good'.

Baxter and Montgomery propose that '[t]his dialogic self is one that is much more of the moment and fluid than more traditional notions, which assume kinds of stable 'mental reservoirs' from which all actions spring' (1996: p.338), and Bakhtin stresses that the self is in a constant state of 'becoming'. He talks of being as an 'event', because of the on-going activity of becoming. The dialogic self is very much a storied self. In the following section, I turn to the use of stories in framing the self and examine how a dialogic perspective is situated vis-à-vis other perspectives.

3.3.2 Storied selves and identities

The notion that human beings are storytellers and use stories to make sense of and guide our everyday lives has been embraced widely as part of the 'narrative turn' both by social scientists (Chamberlayne et al., 2000) and those studying literature:

I take for granted the ways in which storytelling engages our interest, curiosity, fear, tensions, expectation, and sense of order. What concerns me here are the qualities which fictional narrative shares with that inner and outer storytelling that plays a major role in our sleeping and waking lives. For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future (Hardy, 1968: p.5).

Whilst scholars approach storied selves and identities from different perspectives resulting in varying theories and methods of research being applied, it seems there is consensus within the broad field of narrative inquiry that lives and experiences are made sense of through stories, and as such, identities are constructed through narrative. Smith and Sparkes (2008) suggest that within this field, there is also a shared perception of self and identity being multidimensional (and hence, plural) and relational – that is connected to, and thereby shaped by social, historical, political and cultural contexts. However, they argue that primacy given to the social relational or the individual varies, and they differentiate between perspectives along a continuum from 'thick individual'/'thin social relational' to 'thin individual'/'thick social relational'. 'Psychosocial' perspectives (for example McAdams, 1993), acknowledge that selves and identities are constructed through social interaction, but the focus is very much on the individual. At the other end of their spectrum, the authors place 'performative' perspectives, where selves and identities are discursive actions, constructed entirely within talk. This end of the continuum is therefore 'home' to discursive psychologists (e.g. Edley, 2002, Potter, 2005, Wetherell, 1998). Between these, the authors place along the continuum, 'intersubjective' perspectives (where we find symbolic interactionists such as Ezzy, 1998, and Mead, 1934), then 'storied resource' perspectives (e.g. Holstein and Gubrium, 2000, Somers, 1994), and then 'dialogic' perspectives (e.g. Frank, 2005, Hermans, 2001, Sampson, 1993, Shotter, 2005, Taylor, 1991). The 'dialogic' narrative identity is judged by the authors to employ: 'a 'thick' social and relational lens, coupled with a sense of the individual, albeit in a very quiet voice' (Smith and Sparkes, 2008: p.23). Concurrence or not with this conclusion depends perhaps on the interpretation of 'individual' in this context. The dialogical self is,

as we have seen, very much a social relational self. However, the self is not subsumed in the social, but rather re-cast as the self/other, with a sense of individuality, answerability and agency. The individual mind, according to dialogism, does not work in isolation of the social, but it is central to sense-making and producing the storied self (Gergen, 1999).

As already referred to in the previous section, parallels can be drawn between the dialogic self and the symbolic interactionist self, particularly with regards to Mead's (1934) concept of the 'generalised other'. One can also perceive similarities between the 'storied resource' stance and Bakhtin's notion of an individual assimilating, drawing on and being shaped by 'speech genres' (Bakhtin, 1986). Somers (1994), for example, envisages three levels of narratives: ontological narratives which are the stories used to define who we are, and these are linked to public narratives which in turn are linked to metanarratives, such as Progress or Capitalism vs. Communism. Bakhtin (1986: p.61) takes a different stance in distinguishing between 'primary speech genres' which are everyday and simple, and more complex, ideological 'secondary speech genres' seen in for example literary, legal, scientific or socio-political commentary. Both place great emphasis on the complex relational and cultural matrix within which identities need to be analysed. Shotter and Billig (1998) illustrate a number of ways in which discursive psychology shares its approach with dialogism, for example referencing Shotter's (1992) focus on 'fleeting moments' and Billig's (1996) social rhetorical psychology which views the social world as an argument back and forth. The greatest distinction is with the 'psychosocial', where the focus is on narrative as access to the 'inner world', to a sense of inner reality. Here, identity is a long-term project and psychological wellbeing is thought to depend on a unifying, coherent story (see for example McAdams, 1993, McAdams, 2005). Smith and Sparkes (2008) identify that the 'storied resource' and 'performative' perspectives share the 'dialogic' perspective's differentiations with the 'psychosocial', in terms of being non-foundational, not looking to reveal an 'inner reality', and not placing emphasis on unity and coherence as the function of the narrative self.

Smith and Sparkes (2008) do not conclude by favouring or critiquing any of the five perspectives they describe. Rather they refer to the benefit of appreciating similarities and differences – and entering into a dialogue. Within the growing field of narrative inquiry, they describe the influence of Bakhtin's dialogism as having led to 'a new, rich and active field of scholarship to do with selves and identities' (p.21). They do not offer a point of view as to why this might be the case. It seems possible that the expanding interest may be related to dialogism providing a way of thinking about the self that incorporates and makes sense of the 'centripetal' forces of structure, and 'centrifugal' forces of agency.

De Peuter (1998) discusses the fact that the monologics of mainstream narrative theory that reify a unified, coherent and progressive core self are at odds with the postmodern 'over-saturated' self (reference to Gergen, 1991). She infers however, that a negative reading of the postmodern self as having disintegrated - overwhelmed, unsure, lost in a sea of choices and fragmented identities – is negative, precisely because of the reification of integration and cohesion in the construction of the narrative self. Similarly, she refers to the experience of role conflict as being due to this reification (referencing Sampson, 1993). She proposes that dialogism's honouring of *both* the centripetal and centrifugal forces, which produce the 'dynamic tensions of selfhood', together with the 'boundary constitution of self' challenge how we understand contemporary selfhood (p.31). She goes on to suggest (p.32) that through dialogism 'the concept of contemporary Western self may be liberated from the modernist ideals of centripetal tendencies on the one hand, and from the postmodernist ideals of centrifugal tendencies on the other' (see also Gardiner and Bell, 1998).

In developing a theoretical framework that incorporates a dialogical perspective on the storied self, it became apparent that scholars taking this approach vary considerably in terms of emphasis placed on different aspects of dialogism, and therefore their approach to collecting and analysing the narratives. So, for example, Shotter and Billig's (1998) focus on 'fleeting moments' and the existence of the dialogical in 'little things' (p.27) directs them towards very fine-grained analysis, incorporating the tiniest of bodily gestures (see also Shotter and Katz, 1999). Others put more emphasis on the open-endedness and unfinalisability of dialogism, where what is key is letting the stories and voices within them speak for themselves (for example Frank, 2005). Hermans (2001) gives prominence to multiple selves, and the dialogue that carries on between these 'inner voices', these multiple 'me's' (see also Hermans and Hermans-Jansen, 1995, Hermans and Kempen, 1993). There is also significant interest in the ethical dimension of dialogism and this is taken on and explored theoretically in different ways: for example, Frank (2002) on therapeutic benefits for those with serious illness.

3.3.3 Drawing on Frank: a sociological dialogical approach to stories

The work of sociologist Arthur Frank has been a key reference and inspiration for the development of the dialogical perspective on stories adopted in this framework. 'The Wounded Storyteller' (Frank, 1995) is often cited by those taking a narrative approach - for example, by Gabriel et al (2010) exploring stories of unemployed professionals, and by Miller (2005) taking a narrative approach to the transition to motherhood. Having engaged over time with dialogism (see for example 2002, 2004, 2005), Frank has

retrospectively come to consider his building of narrative typologies in 'The Wounded Storyteller' as being illustrative of a dialogical approach to stories (2005, 2010). His recent book: 'Letting stories breathe: a socio-narratology' (2010), sets out his theoretical thinking regarding the *work* that stories do, recommending a dialogical 'mode of interpretation'. This is followed by a discussion on practices of dialogical narrative analysis, which will be picked up in the next chapter (4.5.1). For me, Frank's work was vital to building the bridge between dialogism as a way of thinking theoretically, to applying this perspective methodologically.

First it is important to establish Frank's (2010: p.14) distinction between 'stories' and 'narratives', which will be followed here, although as he suggests, it can be difficult to maintain such a distinction. Frank notes that 'people tell stories that are very much their own, but they do not make up these stories by themselves' (2010: p.14). Referencing Harrington (2008: p.24), he describes stories as 'living, local, and specific' to the individual, whereas narratives are 'the resources from which people construct the stories they tell and the intelligibility of stories they hear' (2010, p. 14). Narratives are therefore recognisable, shared and echoed in individual stories. This distinction is by no means limited to those taking a dialogical approach, and is similar, for example, to Somers' (1994) notion of narratives being storied resources.

The primary premise of Frank's (2010, p.13) 'socio-narratology' is that it considers stories as 'actors', considering the *work* of a story, or what the story 'does', 'rather than understanding the story as a portal into the mind of the storyteller'. The scope is the 'symbiotic work of stories and humans creating the social' (p.14). It appreciates the dialogical relationship between the story, storyteller and listener, 'analysing how each allows the other to be' (p.16). However, whilst it recognises this relationship, it 'pays most attention to stories acting. It analyses how stories breathe as they animate, assemble and enlighten, and also deceive and divide people' (p.16). In contrast to structuralist narratology that 'cuts stories up into small pieces to formulate principles of how those pieces are assembled' (p.16/17), socio-narratology 'lets stories breathe by studying how they can do what they can do'. I have followed Frank in considering the *work* of the story and the notion of *letting stories breathe* as core principles in establishing this theoretical framework. As such, these will be apparent in guiding the approach to the research design and analysis. Importantly, these principles were imbued with a dialogical perspective. Resonating with Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) engagement with dialogism (3.2.2), the 'crucial' principles of Frank's (2010: p.16) dialogical 'mode of interpretation' are that 'no voice is ever singular – every voice contains multiple other voices' and 'in the interpretation of stories, as in the telling of stories, no speaker should ever be FINALIZED'.

Frank, along with others engaged in dialogism (see 3.3.1), places considerable emphasis on the dialogical ethics of narrative analysis and sees stories as a means of exploring what he calls 'moral impulses'. Along with stories' capacity to display and test character and to make one particular perspective compelling, Frank considers stories to contain an inherent morality, informing individuals' sense of 'what counts as good and bad, and how to act and how not to act' (2010: p.36).

People are not going to stop telling stories: moral life, for better or for worse, takes place in storytelling. Narrative analysis can be a significant model for a society that will continue to work out its moral dilemmas in story form (Frank, 2002: p.116)

In a publication entitled 'What is dialogical research, and why should we do it?' (2005), Frank looks at three studies that he believes illustrate a dialogical stance:

...each depicts the people they are with as struggling to live in accordance with diverse, malleable, and contested standards of moral worth. A significant part of their respective struggles is discovering what those standards are – which standards ought to apply to them at particular junctures in their lives (Frank, 2005: p.972)

This was pertinent to the identities I was exploring, particularly in terms of the 'moral minefield' (Miller, 2005: p.21) women had to negotiate in grappling with what constitutes 'good' mothering, but also with regards to paid work and struggling with what is and what is not 'successful' and/or 'worthwhile'.

From a dialogical perspective, it is 'standards of moral worth' that Frank sees as being 'most significantly unfinalizable' (2005: p.971). With its emphasis on open-endedness, a criticism of dialogism might be that this would result in lack of conclusiveness and that this might render research rather meaningless. However, Frank used the three studies to illustrate how an open-ended approach and attitude does not have to be inconclusive in the pejorative sense. For example, a dialogical theoretical approach does not exclude establishing narrative typologies, as for example in 'The Wounded Storyteller' (Frank, 1995). However types of narrative were used to situate stories in a way that still allowed for stories to speak for themselves and be distinctive within a theme, 'representing individual struggles in all their ambivalence and unfinalizability; in particular, how is each voice the site of multiple voices, and what is the contest among these voices' (p.972). Applying dialogic principles, types of narrative set the scene rather than finalise or box in a person's story – the centripetal tendency to finalise by categorising and typifying can close down the opportunity to identify potential for change.

Frank's 'restitution' narrative captured the discourse that a return to 'normal' or recovery of full health was the expectation for a life 'worth' living for those with serious illness. He suggested that many people embraced this narrative, particularly early on after diagnosis, and that this was part of being positioned as 'patients' by medical practitioners and others. In a new introduction to his book (2013: p.xv), Frank reflects on his own experience of moving from 'restitution' to 'quest' narrative: 'How I lived with illness became the measure of how well I could craft a life, whether I was ill or healthy. This attitude is the basis of understanding one's story as a quest narrative'. A 'chaos' narrative suggested an inability to make sense of one's identity, particularly if imbued with a fatalistic attitude regarding having no future identity, resulting in a story in chaos. According to Frank, most individuals wove their story drawing on and moving between all three narratives in different ways. Frank's 'quest', 'chaos' and 'restitution' narratives are more open-ended than Gabriel et al's (2010) 'moratorium', 'end-of-the-road' and 'temporary derailment' (see 2.2.2). One of the studies (Berger, 2004) focused on allowing the stories to illustrate interruptions to traditional, finalised assumptions (about women with HIV/Aids), leaving the reader with 'unsettling questions' rather than definitive conclusions, opening up dialogue, and paving the way for potential change.

Considering the *work* that stories do also involves appreciating how they provide individuals with a sense of subjectivity, and how 'groups assemble around shared understandings of particular stories' (2010: p.18). Frank (2010: p.52) developed the notion of 'narrative habitus', adapting Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' (see Maton, 2008). He described a person's habitus as: 'her or his disposition to recognise something as familiar or to find it strange and obscure; to like or dislike; to feel comfortable or uncomfortable either doing something or in the presence of something'. Disposition indicates how they feel 'conducted' to do what they do, rather than what they are 'determined' to feel or think – 'the course that seems to flow most naturally'. Associated with 'habitus' was Bourdieu's (1990a: p.62) 'feel for the game'. By combining the concept of 'narrative' with 'habitus', Frank (2010: p.52) refers to the 'embedding of stories in bodies', or the idea that 'people are disposed to certain stories just as they are disposed to certain foods'. As well as involving a repertoire of recognizable, shared stories, narrative habitus provides the '*competence* to use this repertoire as embodied and mostly tacit knowledge' (2010: p.53). This competence refers not only to how and when it is appropriate to use particular narratives, but also to predicting the trajectory of a story and how another might respond to a particular story. Whilst disposed to some stories, an individual may feel indifferent to or reject others. Stories have the capacity to connect but also disconnect people, and to create and play with boundaries.

Dialogism suggests that each utterance is unique and unrepeatable, since it is situated in and spoken through an individual's unique and unrepeatable time/space (chronotope) of social, cultural and historical conditions (heteroglossia). A limitation could therefore be that such a theoretical approach would lead to a series of unique and distinct stories, from which one cannot generalise at all. However, as Frank reminds us: 'Personal stories are, again, not to be understood as strictly *individual*. Any person's story is the site of struggles permeated by multiple voices' (2005: p.972). In other words, a story shows up dialogues between multiple 'me's' and multiple 'generalised others'. It would be important to draw out and comprehend discourses – that is shared discourses, shown up in resonances that echo across stories. However, in order to understand any *struggles* with what the 'standards of worth' might be and to identify potential requirements and means of change, it would be necessary to listen for marginalised voices, subversive voices, voices that interrupt monologue or traditional assumptions (Frank, 2005, 2010). These might be lone voices or quiet voices – voices that many theoretical approaches might ignore.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have told my story of engaging with dialogism. This was firstly via dialectical theory (Baxter, 1990, 1996, 2004, Johnston and Swanson, 2007), and subsequently through an appreciation of epistemological and ontological implications by tracing back to Bakhtin and his take on storied selves (1981, 1986). This was brought to life for me through sociologist Arthur Frank's (1995, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2010) dialogical perspective on stories.

Understanding how women cope with competing and potentially contradictory discourses and how this impacted on their identities was a core concern. The theoretical framework for the thesis followed Johnston and Swanson (2007) in drawing on dialectical theory and the use of *reframing*, *neutralising*, *separating* and *selection* in managing tension. It differs in employing a dialogic perspective (Baxter, 1996, 2004) and in combining this with dialogical theorising on stories (Frank, 2005, 2010). Within the framework I acknowledge that dialectics are unfinalisable and unresolvable due to a constantly changing social world and a requirement to keep open future opportunities. This stance had significant implications for analysis (see Chapter 4), guarding against 'categorising' individuals and one-off resolutions, since individuals may employ different practices in different time/spaces. Dialogic complexity suggested a knot or matrix of interrelated, multiple contradictions or competing pulls and this stressed understanding the *context* in which the core mother-worker dialectic was experienced. Conceptualising the relationship between the mother-worker identities as dialectical meant framing the relationship as

‘both/and’ rather than ‘either/or’ and in dynamic interaction, rather than being fixed. Taking a dialogic perspective meant recognising that contradiction and tension are not always negative – they may be positive.

A dialogical self is a storied self (Bakhtin, 1986). It is through dialogue that the social world is constructed and that an individual makes sense of the world and their place in it. A dialogical approach to narrating selves differs from a ‘psychosocial’ stance by not looking to reveal an ‘inner reality’ and not stressing unity and coherence as the function of the narrative self (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). A distinguishing feature is the focus on identifying *stories of struggle* (Frank, 2005). A dialogical framework honours both centripetal and centrifugal forces. Drawing on Frank (1995, 2002, 2005, 2010), it emphasises exploring shared discourses (speech genres), but also seeking out ‘moral impulses’ and dissenting voices. As illustrated across Chapter 1 and 2, research consistently depicts women as constrained by the dominant and competing discourses of mothering and working, and ‘stuck’ in unsatisfactory situations - identifying ‘centrifugal’ voices, possibly resisting ‘centripetal’ voices, could see the way to breaking out of this stalemate, opening up the dialogue. This potential for resistance together with dialogism’s attempt to account for structure *and* agency were important from a feminist perspective, seeking to illustrate constraints but also opportunities for change.

A dialogic approach is not about revealing the ‘truth’ in stories. Dialogism conceptualises the self in a constant fluid state of becoming (Todorov, 1984). As such, it is constantly reconstructing the past in order to make sense of the present and keep open an identity for the future. In this light, contradictions in the storyline point not to truths and untruths, but to heightened dialogic activity (Frank, 2005). Of core importance was the dialogical emphasis on open-endedness. Narratives, as illustrated in Frank’s (1995) ‘The wounded storyteller’, are about situating and giving a voice to a variety of stories rather than finalising and boxing people into categories. Frank’s (2010) ‘narrative habitus’ was useful in proposing how individuals develop a disposition towards a repertoire of recognisable, shared narratives. Following principles of Frank’s (2010) ‘socio-narratology’, a dialogical approach focuses on the *work* that stories do, adhering to the notion of letting stories *breathe* – thereby illustrating their capacity for showing up individual struggles and ambivalence regarding ‘standards of worth’, as well as multiple voices and contests between them. These principles will be core to the application of the theoretical thinking outlined here.

The next chapter will turn to how this dialogical framework guided the generation and re-telling of stories.

Chapter 4

Generating and re-telling life stories

4.1 Introduction

The primary method for data generation was twenty life story interviews with mothers of older children who were still working part-time. This method had been used in the pilot study (MacGill, 2010), informed by a social constructionist theoretical framework. Since then, the main development had been a deeper engagement with dialogic principles in the theoretical perspective adopted. The preceding chapter followed this development and discussed the epistemological and ontological implications of taking such a perspective. At the heart of this dialogic theorising was the notion that identities are constructed through *narrative* and that *stories* help us make sense of our experiences and encounters with interacting discourses and ideologies in different contexts. A life story approach embraces this *narrative* perspective on identity construction (Atkinson, 1998, Chamberlayne et al., 2000, Cole and Knowles, 2001, McAdams et al., 2006), whilst allowing *tensions* and contradictions to reveal themselves. Section 4.2 will elaborate on the advantages of a life story approach regarding its fit with dialogism, along with its appropriateness for a feminist perspective and the particular objectives of this research.

Section 4.3 will turn to the participants, covering selection (4.3.1), recruitment (4.3.2), and a fuller description of the participants (4.3.3), drawn primarily from the background questionnaire. This supplied contextual information for me as the researcher going into the fieldwork, and provides context for the analysis chapters (5-8). Attention will be drawn in particular to Table 5, capturing 'career' paths. Section 4.4 will explain how the life stories were generated through storytelling sessions, followed by how they were analysed and re-told (4.5). Analysis was predominantly influenced by Frank's (2010) principles of dialogic narrative analysis, with an analytic focus on the *work* of the stories and identifying *narratives* within which to situate the stories. This was accompanied by a focus on what was happening at sites of *tension* in the stories, at the intersection between mother and worker identities and between expectations and experiences, and how dialectic tension was managed (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, Johnston and Swanson, 2006, 2007). The final sections will turn to discussing research quality (4.6), including the importance of reflexivity, and to ethical considerations (4.7).

4.2 A life story approach

Qualitative methods often produce 'narrative' accounts, but this research sits within the field of narrative inquiry where there is theoretical consensus that lives and experiences

are made sense of and identities constructed through stories (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). The previous chapter (see 3.3.2) discussed how a dialogic perspective compared to other narrative approaches. This section will provide a rationale for taking a life story approach to generating stories. It will explain how this approach fitted with a dialogic perspective on stories and dialectics, and with a feminist-inspired objective to understand the potential impact of sustained part-time working on women's mother-worker identities. It will also justify the choice of 'life story', rather than semi-structured interview. Since the aim was to generate detailed accounts of experiences of part-time working mothers in order to understand how they made sense of these experiences, an in-depth qualitative approach was required (Bryman, 2008). Focus groups would have been inappropriate, since they would not have afforded the space for telling in-depth stories, with the dynamic of focus groups being on interaction and discussion between the participants (Rapley, 2004). A one-on-one setting is generally considered more appropriate when discussing deeply personal identity issues (Bryman, 2008).

Life *story* and life *history* can be used interchangeably but it is important to appreciate that there are distinctions in how a life story/history approach is applied, dependent on the theoretical stance and purpose of the research (Atkinson, 1998). Based on the emphasis on *stories* in taking a dialogic perspective, the term life *story* will be used in this research. However, in clarifying a dialogic approach, certain distinctions will be drawn with some key proponents of life *story* terminology, along with resonances (for example Atkinson, 1998, McAdams, 2001), whilst certain similarities will be highlighted with a life *history* approach (for example Josselson, 1995), as well as some differences (for example Kouritzin, 2000).

In some contexts where a life *history* method is used, the notion of incomplete or faded memories can be problematic – for example, capturing cultural traditions that are dying out or re-writing historical accounts to include marginal, ordinary or individual perspectives (Kouritzin, 2000). In these cases, further documentation and perspectives may be collected to corroborate and triangulate oral accounts (Cole and Knowles, 2001). In this thesis, however, there was no need for 'verifying' stories, for example through interviews with other family members. In embracing an epistemology of storied selves, the life story approach taken here was directed by the notion that reconstruction of the past is an integral part of sense making from the perspective of the present (Atkinson, 1998, Frank, 2010).

Some academics place an emphasis on capturing the *whole* life story (Atkinson, 1998, McAdams, 2001). McAdams' (2001) psychosocial stance, however, stresses *unity* and coherence of identity for psychological wellbeing, a point of distinction compared to other narrative identity perspectives (Smith and Sparkes, 2008 – see 3.3.2), and it is this that

prompts his emphasis on the importance of the *whole* life story. Often, however, life histories follow central life themes (Coles and Knowles, 2001), which was the approach taken here.

An emphasis on *life* story was consonant with the overall aim of this study to understand the impact of *sustained* part-time working on women's mother-worker identities. Taking a dialogic perspective to identity construction through stories (Bakhtin, 1986, Frank, 2005), the research was interested in the way in which the participants made sense of where they had ended up, by drawing on their *past* and keeping open their identities for the *future*. Rose (2005) had pointed to the importance of planning and progression in relation to a sense of career. Garey (1999) had indicated that what it is to be a 'good mother' may change as one's children pass through different stages of childhood. A *life* story approach would enable the telling of these stories starting as far back as was appropriate to the story, and highlighting key turning points or transitions, but also tensions and 'choices' along the journey.

Participants were asked to tell their life stories relating to working and mothering – in the context of their lives as a whole. Telling life stories, rather than responding to questions directed at working or mothering, as in a semi-structured interview, encourages the storyteller to contextualise the stories about working and mothering, positioning herself in the stories in relation to social conditions, discourses and others (Frank, 2010, Valentine, 2007). The stories, then, were stories about her *life*, as a mother who works part-time and a part-time worker who is also a mother (Garey, 1999), allowing for these stories to *overlap* and *interconnect*, and to *expand beyond* working and mothering, whenever the storyteller felt this was appropriate or important to the story.

Kouritzin (2000: p.12) points to Josselson's (1995) life history research as challenging prior dichotomous thinking by illustrating the self as inherently dialogic: 'doing life history research means that the research participant may present profoundly conflicting views, and the research need not choose between them'. A life story approach, in allowing stories to 'breathe' (Frank, 2010), is therefore well suited to a study interested in exploring contradiction – potentially shifting responses to the mother/worker dialectic and to contradictions in and between discourses in different time/spaces. Through a dialogic lens, inconsistencies in storyline point not to truths and untruths, but to heightened dialogic activity where key discourses are intersecting, signalling to identify the multiple voices and the crux of their contest (Frank, 2005).

A life story/history approach has been popular with feminist researchers (Lim, 2011, McCall, 2005, Valentine, 2007), for a number of reasons. Its association with giving a voice to marginalised individuals, by centring the individual in the research and providing an empathetic space for her to tell her story in her own words, has been influential (Harding,

1987). The emphasis on lived experience also chimes with a feminist interest to appreciate the social conditions in which women are negotiating their 'choices' and identities (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989). Lending itself to an exploration of contradictions and complex intersections, as described above, has been useful for feminists adopting an intersectionality framework (Collins, 1991, Crenshaw, 1989), with its intent to investigate ways in which identities are constructed and reconstructed in relation to each other and to the 'matrix of domination' (Collins, 1991: p.225) or interconnected systems of oppression such as patriarchy, racism and class.

4.3 The participants

The participants in this study were twenty higher-educated mothers whose youngest child was at secondary school and who had predominantly worked part-time since their children were young. This section will first outline and provide a rationale for participant selection (4.3.1), including a rationale for the number of participants. An explanation of how participants were recruited (4.3.2) will follow and a fuller description of the participants (4.3.3) to provide a context for the stories in the subsequent analysis chapters.

4.3.1 Participant selection

Participant selection focused on the life-stage perspective identified as missing from the literature, as outlined in the Introduction. This set as criteria that their youngest child would be aged 11-16 and they had predominantly worked part-time since having children, having worked full-time beforehand. It was also argued that with the 'hidden brain drain' (EOC, 2005) and potential impact of this on gender equality (Walby, 2007) in mind, the third selection criteria would be to have completed higher education. My final criterion was to recruit women partnered with their children's father in order to explore the impact of sustained part-time working on women's identities, within the context of gendered relationships of care. These four criteria would provide sufficient *shared* experience to reflect experiences associated with a particular, strategically-chosen social group or perspective – higher educated, partnered women, who set off in full-time employed work, most likely with a sense of career, then went part-time when they had children, and have predominantly remained working part-time since then.

Beyond that, no further criteria for selection were set. There was a particular interest in allowing for *diversity* and breadth in experiences of sustained part-time working in terms of job types, levels and sectors, as highlighted in the literature (2.3). This was considered important for appreciating resonances in identity construction across stories capturing

different experiences, as well as identifying distinctions between stories of part-time working. *All* participants were part-time workers, prioritizing diversity of part-time working over a comparison with full-time working or stay-at-home mothers, where distinctions *between* part-time working experiences could end up being conflated. A further reason for leaving selection open regarding part-time working was to appreciate the journeys and how they made sense of where they had ended up, rather than selecting or defining where they might have ended up.

With regards to the number of participants, by opting for this method, depth and breadth of story was prioritized over number and breadth of participants. Sometimes just one or two life stories are used as case studies in papers as either illustrative or exceptional stories (Lim, 2011, Valentine, 2007). Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981) were frequently questioned about the robustness and validity of their pioneering study of life histories in the bakers' trade. They described discovering a 'saturation of knowledge', whereby 'stories began to support each other and make up, all together, a strong body of evidence' (p.187). This could differ, taking only about fifteen interviews with bakery workers, but about thirty interviews with bakers themselves due to the variety of trajectories. Durbin and Tomlinson's (2010) study with a fairly specific group of part-time working managers with children under twelve included sixteen participants. Garey's (1999) thirty-seven female hospital staff all worked in one site, but they varied in role, working status, class, age, presence and age of dependent children. Bearing these previous studies in mind, as well as the pilot study (8 participants), a decision was made to include twenty participants in this study.

4.3.2 Participant recruitment

Participants were predominantly recruited through advertising (Appendix 1) the study in secondary school e-newsletters in and around two cities in the South West. In this way it was possible to target mothers with children at secondary schools, allowing for a diversity of job types, levels and sectors. Fourteen mothers were recruited in this way. Secondly, gatekeepers in the business community were used to approach women they knew who might fit the criteria. Snowballing was not used since women could be identifiable via their stories to other women they knew. As such, only a couple of participants were taken from any one school and only one from each place of work. The first city was chosen for convenience, since it is close to where I live. The geographical area was broadened following the pilot study to include a larger city and surroundings since this offered greater diversity in terms of employment opportunities (for example, a greater number and variety of larger organisations). Broadening the area would also make it less likely that participants would know each other.

Women responding to the request for participation were then sent a fuller information sheet outlining what would be involved (Appendix 2). If they were still happy to take part, they were asked to fill in a one-page background questionnaire (Appendix 3). In responding to the advert, they were agreeing to the three key criteria this request contained – that their youngest child was at secondary school (aged 11-16), that they had worked full-time before having children and that they now worked part-time, having predominantly done so since their children were young. From the start, they therefore understood that this was a study about part-time working mothers of older children. From the questionnaire, I could check they matched these criteria, and screen for higher education and still being partnered with the father of their children. They were unaware that these were criteria. I knew I would be sensitising them to the fact that I was interested in their life stories relating to their mothering and part-time working – as discussed in the previous section (4.3), my approach was to provide them with these central life themes (as opposed to asking them to tell their ‘whole’ life stories). Beyond that, however, I did not want to sensitise them further to what it was I was interested in, allowing their stories to flow as freely as possible. Two women were screened out as they were working in the same jobs as women already recruited and diversity of jobs was a priority.

The short questionnaire captured background information on: age and children’s ages; educational qualifications; current hours and part-time working arrangements; current employment; the proportion of time spent in full-time/part-time/not in paid work since their first child; their job and hours before children; their partner’s job and hours; total joint income; and their mother and father’s occupation and educational level. This was useful for background to the storytelling sessions, and later, to refer to in the analysis, as some of these details were not spelt out in the storytelling. These variables, along with further descriptors drawn from the interviews are outlined in the following section providing a contextual description of the participants. The names of participants have been changed in order to help maintain anonymity.

4.3.3 A description of the participants

As defined by the selection criteria, all participants had their youngest child at secondary school, had worked full-time before children and predominantly part-time since then, were still partnered with the father of their children and had completed higher education. All but one had degrees. The final participant had dropped out of University, but went on to qualify as a Chartered Accountant. Six had postgraduate

Table 1	
Education	
Degree	19
Accountancy	1
Postgraduate	6
Parental Education	
Both parents FE	7
One parent FE	6
Neither parent FE	7

qualifications – either Masters’ degrees or Diplomas. One of these was studying for her second Masters’ degree. One was part way through a PhD when she had her first child, but did not complete it.

Seven participants had both parents having had some further education beyond school and six had one parent with some further education. Seven had neither, and two of these specifically identified in their stories as having come from working-class backgrounds, although they no longer identified as such. Susannah’s father was a draughtsman and then labourer, and her mother a secretary; Judith’s father worked in farm management and her mother did not work. The other five fathers worked as bank staff (two), a detective, an architect (self-taught), and a civil servant (Post Office). Of the seven where both parents were further educated, one mother was a nurse and the other six worked in education. All bar three mothers worked, mostly part-time, and if not in education, in secretarial or administrative roles. One mother was a musician and one an opera singer. Beyond those mentioned above, fathers worked in a variety of professional roles including: a grocery manager, two accountants, a solicitor, an Army officer, a clergyman, three businessmen, a civil servant, an advertising executive, a civil engineer and a metallurgist. The dominant model for parents was male breadwinner and female secondary earner and most though not all were from middle-class backgrounds.

The participants were aged between forty-four and fifty-five and had had their first child between their late twenties and late thirties. Seven mothers suggested in their stories that they had not planned their first pregnancy. Five mothers had three children, of which two had three girls. Five had two boys, five had two girls and five had one of each. Three mothers had both children under 15, and nine had at least one child having finished school or on the verge of doing so. Three-quarters of the participants were State educating their children, three were privately educating their children and two were using a mixture (one using private education just for the 6th Form and one just for one child).

With regards to joint household income, the vast majority were well off and recognised this in their stories. Nine had a joint income of £80,000+, four of £70-80,000, one of £60-70,000 and two of £50-60,000. Indeed, those at the lower end of the spectrum (two

Table 2	
Age	
44-49	10
50-59	10
Had first child aged:	
25-29	4
30-34	9
35-39	7
Children	
Three children	5
Two children	15
Children’s sex:	
Three girls	2
Two boys, one girl	2
Two girls, one boy	1
Two boys	5
Two girls	5
One boy, one girl	5
Both aged >15	3
Child left/leaving	9

earned a joint income of £30-40,000 and two of £40-50,000) still acknowledged their relatively comfortable position.

In terms of contribution to this joint household income, three-quarters of the participants were now very much secondary earners, with their husbands being the main breadwinners. Only one was the main breadwinner and four were contributing fairly similar earnings to their partners (all four being at the lower end the household income spectrum). This compares to the situation pre-children, where seven participants referred to earning more than their partners and only two suggested that they were always secondary earners.

Table 3		
Joint income		
£80k+	9	
£70-80k	4	
£60-70k	1	
£50-60k	2	
£40-50k	2	
£30-40k	2	
Participant's contribution		
	Current	Pre-kids
More	1	7
Equal	4	11
Less	15	2

In the intervening years, since having children, the vast majority of partners had continued to work full-time and many had progressed considerably in their careers. Two partners worked part-time during the early years of parenting. Of these, one (Steph's partner) had continued to work part-time alongside his partner all the way through. Two further partners worked full-time but shared the child-care early on (one worked flexibly as a freelancer, the other worked locally and more reasonable hours than his partner). Three fathers chose to step back in their work to be around more during the teenage years – two were now working part-time and one flexibly from home (all three were still

Table 4	
Partner's caregiving	
FT/secondary caregiver	13
FT/shared caring early yrs	2
PT/shared caring early yrs	1
PT/shared throughout	1
PT/flexible teenage yrs	3
Partner's working hours	
Away all week	1
60+ hours	2
50-59 hours	3
40-49 hours	5
35-39 hours	7
25-29 hours	1
Varies (PT self-employed)	1

main breadwinners, with a joint household income of £80,000+). One partner worked away from home all week, ten worked over 40 hours and seven worked 35-39 hours. The vast majority of partners were also University educated. All the partners worked in professional jobs, including: three in teaching (one also being a designer and one also a photographer); six in business or consultancy roles; three in IT/software; a mental health specialist; an architect; a chartered surveyor; a civil servant; a TV executive producer; a social work manager; a tax manager; and a structural engineer.

Table 5: 'Career' paths			
Name	Job when had first child (x years ago)	Since children	Current job (years in job)
Changed jobs - Below previous level			
Denise	Head of Dept., Heritage services (19)	FT > career break > PT at lower level	Practice manager (6) (structural engineers)
Cara	Management consultant (19)	Private sector > public sector > lower level in HE	Mid-senior manager, HE (14) + private coaching
Paula	TV producer (16)	FT > career break > PT at lower level	Primary school admin (7) + community radio
Jessica	Accountant (19)	> small local firm 13 years > re-trained 2 years ago	Primary school finance officer (2)
Judith	Mental health occupational therapist (OT) (15)	Spells out of work > physical OT	Physical OT (9) > various 'low level' jobs (just)
Same line of work - Below previous level			
Janey	Co-owner veterinary practice (15)	Sold practice on return > training vet nurses > vet	Vet (11 on and off) + music teacher
Carol	Head of Careers Service; Lecturer (20)	FT > career break > PT at lower level	School careers advisor (9) + relationship counselling
Same line of work - Similar level			
Harriet	Market researcher (15)	> SE on return	SE market researcher (14)
Karen	Sales & marketing manager (16)	> SE on return	SE sales/marketing (15) + parents' network
Susannah	Correspondent (13)	6yrs PT as correspondent > SE 6 years ago	SE multi-media content (6) + training
Charlotte	Marketing manager (18)	FT > career break > PT at lower level > FT (just)	Marketing manager (12) (various roles, same firm)
Delia	Dentist (14)	Same practice 23 years	Dentist (23)
Gabby	In-house barrister (20)	In-house barrister > fee-paying > support lawyer	Professional support lawyer (6; previous firm 8)
Joanna	Health visitor (13)	Moved west 9 years ago	Health visitor (9) + counselling + Masters
Di	Tax consultant for Big Four firm (16)	Big Four > small local firm > medium local firm	Tax consultant (13)
Same line of work – Slight/slow progression			
Sam	Architect (20)	Re-trained as DT teacher > SE architect for 8 years	Architect (5) (recently made Associate)
Steph	Charity campaigner (16)	Admin > digital specialist > SE 6 years ago	SE online consultant (6) + coaching
Tanya	Nurse (17)	Spells of time not working, FT & night shifts	Clinical nurse specialist (5)
Teresa	HR manager (16)	Same job 14 years before promotion (upped hours)	HR director (2)
Sara	TV researcher (18)	Slow progression > took redundancy last year	SE TV producer (1)

SE = self-employed; PT = part-time; FT = full-time

Table 5 aims to capture the key information relating to participants' 'career' paths. This context is crucial to appreciating the stories of mothering and working told in Chapters 5-8 and will be referred back to over the course of the discussion (Ch.9). From the information gleaned from the background questionnaires, it was apparent, even before starting the fieldwork, that the overall picture was one of a relative lack of career progression. This was over a period of at least thirteen years (since they had their first child), and for most, nearer two decades.

Only a quarter had made modest progress in their careers since having children and working part-time. Five participants had changed their line of work since returning, and were now working below the level that they had worked pre-children. Two further women were working below their pre-children level, although in similar lines of work. Of the seven in total working below their previous level, three initially returned full-time, then subsequently had a career break before returning to work part-time in lower level jobs. Three of these seven had moved to work in schools. Eight women were working in similar lines of work, at a similar level to pre-children. Three of these had moved to self-employment, where in certain respects they had more responsibility (in that they have full responsibility for their projects), but at the same time, had lost status and/or the nature of their work was more limited. Of the rest, two had remained in the same roles (dentist and health visitor) throughout, one had compromised by moving sideways twice (lawyer), and two had stepped back and then slightly back up again (one in their role in marketing, and the other in the organization and its scope in tax consultancy). Of the fifteen women working below or at a similar level to pre-children, the vast majority, after changes and adjustments during the early years, had remained in the same job for many years.

It is worth noting that eight of the participants had second jobs, mostly self-employed, and one participant was studying for a Masters' degree. These second jobs were not always reported on the background questionnaire. This had also been the case in the pilot study, where five of the eight participants had taken on second jobs. A concern that this might have been influenced by a lack of employment opportunities in the small city where the pilot was conducted was part of the reason for extending the research to include a larger city in the region.

In terms of part-time working patterns, these had often varied over the years. Five returned part-time but then found they needed to cut their hours further and many made readjustments to working patterns at different points – in particular to manage two children at different

Table 6	
Shifts in PT hours	
Shift down early years	5
Shift up recent years	14
Current PT hours	
30+ hours	6
25-29 hours	6
24 hours	4
16-23 hours	4

stages, to manage short pre-school sessions at nurseries, and when children started primary school. Fourteen had slightly upped their hours again since then, usually in conjunction with children being at secondary school.

With regards to current hours, six were now working 30+ hours per week (one of whom went back full-time between our two sessions) and a further six 25-29 hours. The remaining eight were working 16-24 hours, although half of these were working 24 hours, so only four out of the twenty participants were working less than the equivalent of three days per week (0.6). Those working the longest hours tended to work every day with some shorter days. Four of those working shorter hours worked these as four shorter (school hours) days. Twelve participants usually had at least one day during the week not in paid work. Most of those who were self-employed did most or at least some work from home. Two others did a bit of work from home. In addition to those self-employed, five further participants were able to flex their hours a bit if they needed to. Three of these women were able to trade hours during term-time to have more time off during the holidays. The three mothers who worked in schools worked term-time only.

4.4 The storytelling sessions

The storytelling was conducted over two sessions. In the pilot study, one two-hour session was found to be tight in allowing for the participants to tell their stories of working and mothering, and to prompt any areas for clarification or further stories. At the same time, two hours was found to be at the upper limit for one storytelling session for most participants – by that stage most were flagging and needing a break. Bearing in mind the significant amount of time these women were giving up to tell their stories, I felt I should give them the choice to do one session, with a short break, or two separate sessions. Eleven chose two separate sessions, whilst nine chose to do the two sessions back-to-back. Together, the two sessions took between two and three-quarter hours and four hours, averaging close to three-and-a-quarter hours. Before the first session started, participants were asked to give written consent. The Consent Form (Appendix 4) reminded them of the terms of participation, as seen previously on the Information Sheet (Appendix 2). All but two sessions were carried out in the participant's own home – chosen primarily for convenience, but also providing an environment with little distraction or likelihood of interruption, and providing a comfortable space, conducive to relaxing into storytelling. One respondent chose to do her back-to-back sessions at work in a quiet meeting room, and one did one session at work and one at home.

In the first session, participants were given the space to tell their stories with very little interruption (Atkinson, 1998, Frank, 2005). I started all participants off with the same introduction (Appendix 5), asking them to tell me their life stories with particular reference to

being a mother and working part-time. Participants began as far back as they felt was appropriate. Some needed a little prompting to keep their story going. Often this simply took the form of starting them off again from a different perspective. For example, many ended up following their career journeys since this started pre-children, so they could tell their mothering stories somewhat sporadically and focusing on how they fitted work around children - so if they ran out of steam, I could set them going again by asking them to go back and tell their stories of being a mother.

My discussion 'guide' (Appendix 5) was developed in sections that were broadly chronological, but also took into account the different perspectives I was interested in. These were anticipating potential time/spaces. The discussion areas covered: upbringing, education and dreams/expectations; working pre-children; becoming a mother; being a mother and going back to work; part-time working; mothering and parenting; being a part-time working mother; reflections on changes in perceptions over time (mothering, work/part-time work, domestic work, and feminism/equality); surprises about where have ended up; any questions. These were developed with the overall aim in mind – to understand the potential impact of sustained part-time working on women's identities with regards to motherhood and work – taking into account learning from the literature reviews in Chapters 1 and 2. The content of the guide was kept to short headings, rather than spelling out questions. This was primarily to aid negotiation of the discussion areas. The guide was only used if and when it was needed, some needing it more than most. I was not following the guide logically from start to end, but rather trying to locate new starting off points that had not yet been covered, as the storytelling progressed and faltered. Sometimes my prompt was simply used as reassurance that I was interested in what they had to say.

The second session included more guided discussion, to allow for clarification, to fill in any gaps in stories and to allow for reflection (Skinner, 2013). The focus was still on eliciting free-flowing stories, using open-ended questions (what/how) rather than asking for justifications (why/why not) or using closed (yes/no) questions (Cole and Knowles, 2001, Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). The eleven choosing two separate sessions were able to read the transcript of their first session and reflect on this when we met again a couple of months later. In the four stories re-told in detail (Chapters 5 and 7) I have referenced where storytelling was after a break or at a separate session. Although Cara slightly adjusted her story in her second session, confirming that she felt she had got her priorities 'wrong' when the children were little (5.2.4), this was not found across the other stories. I have not therefore referenced or discussed this distinction in the other findings chapters. As noted previously, the purpose of allowing this choice was for the convenience and preference of the participants. The gap between sessions was not significant when considering the span of their life stories. It was

not intended to include a longitudinal element, as for example in Miller's (2005) study where interviews nine months in revealed a reworking of their post-birth stories.

All the sessions were digitally recorded and fully transcribed. Significant pauses and emotion (laughter or tears) were noted, but not every detail as called for by some methodologies.

4.5 Analysing and re-telling the stories

Social scientists adopting a theoretically informed narrative approach note that there is no set way of applying narrative analysis (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008, Riessman, 2008). Frank (2005, 2010) concurs with this, and although he proposes applying *dialogical* narrative analysis, he refers to this as a 'practice of criticism' (2010: p.73) rather than a method, prompting 'questions of storytelling practice' (2010: p.74), rather than prescribing a set of procedures. In this section, I will describe how I went about analysing and re-telling the stories. This was guided by Frank's (2005, 2010) principles of dialogical narrative analysis and paying attention to the research objective – to understand the impact of sustained part-time working on mother and worker identities. I will come on to describe how dialogical dialectical theory (Baxter, 1990, 2004, Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, Johnston and Swanson, 2007) helped to inform analysis of how participants were managing tensions within and between mother and worker identities.

4.5.1 Dialogical narrative analysis

Each story was considered a 'case study' (Cole and Knowles, 2001), requiring time and 'space' to get close to and appreciate, as a *story*. This meant analysing each story separately, before making any cross-story comparisons - in order to be able to appreciate the *work* of the story, which according to a dialogic perspective was key to interpretation (Frank, 2010). Whilst I considered NVivo to help organise the large amount of data (between 25,000 and 40,000 words per participant), this was ruled out as inappropriate, since the priority was to maintain the storyline and not fragment the stories into themes (an issue identified in the pilot study). Whilst there was a theoretical impetus to 'letting stories breathe' (Frank, 2010), as well as this being guided by both dialogic and feminist ethical considerations (see 4.7), there was nonetheless a practical requirement to organise and summarise the stories in some way.

Bakhtin's (1981) concept of time/space (or 'chronotope', referring to the fusion of time and space in narratives) was utilised to frame the summaries. Bakhtin (1981: p.250) described 'chronotopes' as being 'the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events' in storytelling, and 'the place where the knots of narrative are told and untold'. Frank's (2010: p.105) notion of translating the story into 'scenes' was helpful here. Each

story was first read and reread for familiarisation, and to make sure I was *listening* (Frank, 2010). In summarising the story, I maintained the storyline in the order that it was told, and wherever feasible kept the participant's terminology. The aim was to capture how the story was constructed, by identifying the key time/spaces and by highlighting critical junctures and tensions in the storytelling. Often the main storyline initially followed the participant's 'career' story, since this preceded having children, and critical junctures or turning points, particularly during the early years of mothering, were often driven by changes in childcare requirements. But whilst stories started off being told chronologically, they often side stepped into related 'spaces' or leapt backwards or forwards dependent on the *work* of the story at the time, and the connections being made with other strands of story. A time/space framework meant identifying and capturing these key shifts. The summaries were organised by time/space, each one having a headline in bold so that it stood out at a glance, with the key points of the related storytelling below and indentation being used to signify a sub-point. The summaries were generally 3-4,000 words.

These time/space summaries proved invaluable during the subsequent stages of interpreting the stories, providing an easily accessible reference to the construction and *work* of the stories, which whilst summarised, retained an appreciation of the *context* in which points were made. A disadvantage compared to using NVivo, was the more time-consuming practicality of retrieving and comparing quotations, when it came to re-telling stories. In the summaries, I highlighted where there was a pertinent quote and gave the corresponding page number in the transcript. This worked adequately, but took time.

The next stage of analysis involved teasing out the mothering and working story strands and capturing a summary of these separately, together with an indication of where they impacted on and interacted with each other. This was guided by the 'both/and' conceptualisation of the mother and worker identities (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996) and the aim to analyse how the experiences of mothering and working told in the stories might have impacted on worker and mother identities. A one-page matrix was developed that incorporated three columns – one for 'working', one for 'mothering' and a third for 'other' key contextual points relating to parents/background, partners, and views on feminism/equality/gender. The rows worked from the top, downwards, following the chronology of the stories, side by side, each step illustrating a critical juncture, either driven by a 'career' or 'mothering' shift, and capturing how they impacted on each other. The bottom third to a half of the framework was reserved for key themes relating to the story above. In the 'working' column there was usually a space for 'part-time working', and a second, often relating to 'how they feel about where they have ended up'. The

'mothering' column invariably had a section on 'teenagers', and the third column tended to have a section on 'partnering and fathering' and one on 'feminism/equality'. Since these were derived from the stories, there was a degree of flexibility to the key themes included and how the space divided between biographical sections and thematic sections.

So far, I have described the stages of analysis that organised the data, preparing it for interpretation. Frank (2010) describes his building of a typology of narrative forms in his book 'The Wounded Storyteller' (1995) as an exemplar of dialogical narrative analysis. Identifying narratives and illustrating how these were used to negotiate discourses and experiences, thereby revealing identity construction in action, was central to the interpretative analysis in this research. In doing so, analysis was guided by a number of dialogic principles, outlined by Frank (2005, 2010). Of key importance was the notion of an open-ended approach, avoiding boxing participants in, or 'finalising' them (see 3.3.3). This meant avoiding categorising people. Narratives were for situating stories, but still allowing for them to speak for themselves and be distinctive. Frank's (2010) notion of 'narrative habitus', in reference to the way individuals develop a disposition towards a repertoire of recognisable, shared narratives, was useful. The aim was to identify narratives that captured a sense of the *work* of the stories (Frank, 2005, 2010) in relation to mothering and to working and the impact of sustained part-time working at different time/spaces. As I worked through the time/space summaries and the mothering/working matrices, I began to get a feel for potential shared narratives. This was an iterative process, cycling between the stories and tentative narrative templates that arose.

With each story, establishing the *work* of the story was guided by Frank's (2010: p.74) 'questions of storytelling practice', adapted to be appropriate for these stories of mothering and working. This meant questioning what it was the story was justifying, what was at stake and for whom, paying attention to the particular way the story was constructed and 'how does the story change people's sense of what is possible, what is permitted and what is responsible or irresponsible' (p.75). Stories have a special capacity for showing up a desire for an alternative trajectory, what might have been. Was the story constructed as 'demoralizing' or as 're-moralizing', and did it suggest the outcome to be a 'success'? Questioning sought to appreciate how participants were making sense of where they had ended up (both looking back and forward), and how they were positioning themselves and others in the story in a particular time/space. For example, did the storyteller position herself as 'holding her own' as a mother or as 'struggling' to achieve mothering expectations, and also 'is the story making it more difficult for other people to hold their own?'(p.75). In re-telling the stories, I consistently point out the *work* of the stories. A particular focus was identifying *tension* in the stories, which could show up

through critical junctures, turning points, struggles with sense making or contradictions. Once pinpointed, I sought to understand what was at the nub of any struggle and how tension was managed. This leads into how I applied dialectical theory through a dialogic lens. This was not a next step, but was done in conjunction with exploring narratives, and understanding the *work* of the story.

4.5.2 Applying dialectical theory

In the pilot study (MacGill, 2010), Johnston and Swanson's (2007) use of Baxter's (1990) dialectical theory in investigating how mothers of pre-school children managed tension between mother-worker identities was applied to part-time working mothers of older children. The four potential responses used in the analysis were retained. These were: *selection*, whereby one option is made dominant to the exclusion of the other, *separation*, where the interdependence is denied and the options are separated temporally or spatially, and *neutralisation*, which is typified by dilution and compromise. Having had occasional difficulty in distinguishing neutralising in the pilot, drawing on my experience and Baxter (1996), I clarified that this strategy tended to employ counterbalance, for example, by adjusting practices at one pole to release and thus neutralise tension at the other. However, without having adjusted expectations, or when compromise is greater than expected, this can be perceived negatively as dilution and experienced as dissatisfaction. *Reframing* was retained, indicating a perceptual shift in the way dimensions of meaning are expressed so that forces are no longer considered to be in opposition or tension, but the fact that this is temporary was stressed (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996).

In following Baxter's (1996, 2004) deeper engagement with dialogism (see 3.2.2), this analytic strategy was not used to 'categorise' individuals (see previous section), or to suggest a 'resolution' of a singular competing pull between mothering and working, as Johnston and Swanson (2007) had done. Baxter's (1996, 2004) dialogic lens highlighted the complexity of multiple interacting and shifting tensions that required attention. They indicated that different practices may be employed in different time/spaces, and that not only did tensions rise and fall and shift qualitatively in different contexts, but that tensions between mother and worker identities could intersect and interact with a matrix of further tensions and competing pulls.

Applying this analytic strategy to tensions in conjunction with dialogical narrative analysis worked well. The narratives helped situate the use of strategies such as *reframing* or *neutralising*, within a specific context and from a particular perspective in the story. This analysis was then helpful in delving deeper into how participants were managing tension

and constructing and negotiating their mother-worker identities, placing a spotlight on what was happening at the intersection (see also Skinner, 2011). This was an improvement on its use in the pilot study (MacGill, 2010). Although the pilot study identified different strategies for *reframing* fulfilment from work, for example, and these resonated with findings in this research, I was conscious at the time that these were extracted from the life stories as themes, thus losing an understanding of their contribution to the *work* of the story.

4.5.3 Re-telling the stories

One of the key issues I grappled with, was how to re-tell the stories – how to do justice to them, to allow them to ‘breathe’ (Frank, 2010) and thus give the participants ‘a voice’ (Harding, 1987). There was not sufficient space to tell all twenty stories. I decided to develop two chapters (5&6) that would focus on re-telling stories of mothering (appreciating this was ‘as a part-time worker’, and allowing for how these interacted), and two (7&8) on stories of sustained part-time working (again taking into account this was ‘as a mother’, and how these interacted). With each pair, the first chapter re-tells two stories in detail, the stories chosen not to be ‘typical’, but as illustrative of the use of different narratives in different contexts. The choice was guided by ‘an analytic interest’ (Frank, 2010: p.114) in what the stories could illuminate regarding sense-making and identity construction. The two stories told in Ch.5 illustrated the divergent levels of tension in the early mothering stories being at opposite ends of the spectrum. Sara’s story in Ch.7 was told to bring to life struggling with resisting a narrative of *resumption* of a full-time ‘career’ focus and with keeping at bay a narrative of *disorientation*. Of all the stories, she had kept going ‘against the odds’, and achieved some progression. This story was in many ways atypical, but as such, was productive and rich as an illustration (see for example Portelli, 1997). In the course of re-telling the stories, I have pointed out my interpretation of the *work* the story is doing. The second chapters (Ch. 6 and 8) then use these stories as reference points to make connections across the stories, drawing out resonances and dissonances, attempting to disentangle story threads and examining tensions, how these are managed, and how these relate to the narratives. As Frank (2010: p.7) notes, ‘stories stand best together, ever increasing the resonance of others like it’.

Drafts of the findings chapters were shared with the participants. This was not about ‘verifying’ their stories (see 4.6). This was done to help participants protect their anonymity and remove any details they were uncomfortable with, but it also acknowledged that generating and re-telling stories is a co-construction between participant and researcher (Frank, 2010, Miller, 2005). Involving participants in the

process of interpretation was an ethical consideration (Birch and Miller, 2002), and allowed participants the opportunity to point out perceived misrepresentations or misunderstandings. In the event, requests for amendments were rare, and more likely to relate to anonymity. Around half the participants provided feedback and this tended to be positive about the faithfulness of the re-assembling and the consonance of connections across the stories. This reassured on the trustworthiness of the representation and interpretation of the stories.

Analysis and interpretation were guided by the theoretical principles, literature and research objectives, and connections were continually being made back and forth between these and the stories. The findings chapters do not overtly make these links and focus, as discussed above, on resonances and distinctions in and between the stories themselves. Rather these connections with the broader literature are drawn out and discussed in Ch.9. This was decided partly on the grounds of clarity, in the belief that the findings themselves were complex enough with regards to the interconnections and overlapping between the story strands. This was also necessary, because having separated out the stories of mothering and working, it was then important to understand how they overlapped and intersected in order to appreciate the overall impact of sustained part-time working on mother-worker identities, and theorising how participants were constructing and negotiating these identities (Ch.9).

4.6 Research quality

It has long been argued (Golafshani, 2003, Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Stenbacka, 2001) that the standard criteria of reliability, validity, generalisability and objectivity, developed from a positivist theoretical perspective and applied traditionally to quantitative research, are incompatible with qualitative research.

Atkinson (1998: p.59) refers to measures such as 'reliability' and 'validity' as being inappropriate standards for a life story interview – with 'reliability' seeking to understand the 'extent to which questioning will reveal the same answers' and 'validity' examining the 'extent to which inquiry yields the 'correct' answers or a quality of fit between the information received or observed and that expected'. In agreement with Atkinson (1998), a storied selves epistemology placed an emphasis not on the 'accuracy' of the story, since this can differ, dependent on the specific context of the time/space, but on what the story could tell us about how the storyteller felt about their relationship with the story – there is no one 'true' or 'correct' story to capture (see also Frank, 2010, Portelli, 1981). From a dialogical perspective, Frank (2010: p.89) describes the stories people recount about their lives as 'authentic fabrications'. Drawing on recent research on memory (Boyd, 2009), he

argues that 'dialogical narrative analysis treats stories not as expressions of an archival memory that already has form and content somewhere outside stories. Rather, stories are the ongoing work of enacting or performing memory'. This argument also counters the proposal that telling life stories for the purposes of a research study results in a higher level of self-reflexivity than usual, and thus in stories that potentially lack authenticity (Atkinson, 1997). According to dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981, Frank, 2010), authenticity is created in the process of telling stories, as an individual confronts experiences and expectations and attempts to make sense of them. An important aspect to re-telling the stories was therefore to aim to illustrate this sense making in action. Another limitation proposed regarding 'reliability' of personal accounts is that participants may feel obliged to position them selves as living up to perceived expectations. Miller (2005), for example, discussed this in relation to the stories told by first-time mothers, feeling the pressure to show a 'natural' instinct for mothering. Again, a dialogic perspective stresses the 'authenticity' of the 'fabrication' in the time/space of its reconstruction. It also directed me to focus on the *work* of the story and any *tension* within it – aiming to show up inconsistencies and/or heightened dialogic activity, and identify the crux of any struggle with expectations, even if only in a 'quiet' voice. 'Credibility' is commonly referred to as important to assessing the quality of qualitative research and can be achieved in various ways, with reflexivity considered pivotal (Creswell, 1998, Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Stenbacka, 2001). Part of establishing credibility is being explicit about the theoretical perspective and research objectives, and the careful and strategic application of these to the research design. The reader is then able to assess the findings from a position of appreciating how and why the research has been conducted in a particular way. I have endeavoured to make conscious (see Stenbacka, 2001) the development of a dialogic perspective (Ch.3) and how this directed the approach taken to the research (through this chapter), as well as being transparent about the research process. From the start, I have also made it clear that the objective to understand the impact of sustained part-time working on mother-worker identities has been inspired by a feminist aim to improve gender equality and women's lives (Gillies and Alldred, 2002, Oakley, 2000, Skinner et al., 2005). This then makes sense of the framing of the discussion (Ch.9), where substantial space is given to critiquing Hakim's (2004) Preference Theory, and the seeking of opportunities for changing the status quo.

A dialogic perspective also emphasises the importance of reflexivity in appreciating the dynamics of co-construction in storytelling (Frank, 2010). Others taking a narrative approach also make visible this co-production (see Miller, 2005), and this is common to many feminist methodologies (see Skinner et al, 2005). Feminists have been instrumental

in arguing the case for acknowledging these dynamics in qualitative research, rejecting the notion of interviewer 'objectivity' and the 'respondent' as the 'researched' (Oakley, 1981). This involved being sensitive to the interaction between the storyteller and me and between each of us and the story. According to Frank (2010: p.99): 'Participants are experts, at least in their own lives, and the dialogical interviewer is there to learn from the participant'. A responsible, dialogic attitude to carrying out and interpreting life story research placed an emphasis (for me) on actively listening, rather than directing questioning, and on adopting a participatory approach. Practically this meant, for example, allowing plenty of time for the sessions so participants were able to tell their stories fully, without being hurried or curtailed, and devoting time to close engagement with each of the stories before commencing analysis. It also involved inviting email dialogue and sharing transcripts and drafts of findings chapters (see 4.4. and 4.5). Lincoln and Guba (1985) considered taking interpretation back to participants as crucial to increasing trustworthiness through avoiding misunderstandings. This was more about 'testing out' (see Miller, 2005) my interpretation than 'verifying' the participant's account.

Feminists have drawn attention to power relations between interviewer and participant in the co-construction of personal accounts, and there has been much emphasis on trying to 'minimise' power the interviewer may have over the participant (Skinner, 2005). Offering participants the opportunity to participate in re-telling the stories was in part to help counter any 'power' I might have. I also made participants aware of my shared experiences of mothering and part-time worker, from the start (see Appendix 1). An 'insider' position is considered helpful in reassuring participants of an empathetic ear, but it was also useful that my own children were only 10 and 12 at the time (I was invariably asked about them fairly early on), giving participants the position of expert in mothering teenagers (see also Lim, 2011). In reflecting on this, I firmly believe that the women participating saw me as empathetic and that this enabled them to open up. Many made comments about wanting to take part because they felt strongly about the topic, and were grateful to me for trying to do something about it. They appeared to assume (correctly), that I must have felt passionately about my own experiences, if this had prompted me to embark on a PhD. A few intimated a little intimidation regarding me being a PhD student. In these cases, I attempted to defuse this by explaining that I had always done research, and that this was a way of being able to research something of my own choosing. Many referred afterwards to having been surprised by some of the things they had revealed.

Acknowledging my subjective position in the research, in agreement with many feminists and the principles of dialogism, also requires me to be open about my own experiences and views coming into this research. This is part of being accountable for the knowledge

produced (Skinner et al, 2005). I have already been clear about my theoretical stance and feminist-inspired objective. The latter already hints at my position. It is important to be transparent about the fact that my own experiences of sustained part-time working have been ambivalent with regards to working, negative with regards to 'career' and positive in relation to mothering. When I did the pilot study in 2010, I wrote my own life story about mothering and working – to lay bare my own feelings. I have then been able to return to this from time to time to reflect. I cannot and would not claim that I have avoided any 'bias' I have brought into this research, but I have attempted not to be 'blinded' by it (Skinner, 2013). I have tried to be respectful of and responsible towards the re-telling of others' stories, by listening, giving them 'space', not 'finalizing', and sharing with participants (Frank, 2005, 2010).

Frank (2010) suggests that whilst the researcher does not have interpretive 'authority', what they can add is connections to other stories – either within their story or illustrating how their story resonates or is distinct from other stories. In this way, the researcher is helping reassemble stories and provide new perspectives. Whilst each story is individual, it contains within it multiple voices, in the form of shared discourses, experiences and narratives, and a dialogic perspective directs the researcher to seek these out. In the analysis, I have paid particular attention to making these connections. Furthermore, the stories in this research were from carefully and strategically chosen participants – chosen due to an analytic interest. The stories can then be re-connected to specific debates in the literature. The extent to which the researcher is able to do this is also part of establishing research quality. Thus whilst a life story approach might be criticised for not being generalisable (see Atkinson, 1998), confidence in the research can be boosted by 'transferability' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The approach taken to the Discussion (Ch.9) is to situate and discuss the findings in relation to the literature, taking key debates and the research objectives as points of reference, rather than providing a comprehensive summary of the findings.

4.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations for carrying out this research were guided by the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (2002) and formal ethical approval was obtained from my supervisors and the Head of Department for Social and Policy Sciences. Taking a feminist perspective had placed a particular emphasis on certain ethical considerations, in particular, the issue of power relations between researcher and participant and enabling the participant to speak freely and be listened to. These particular aspects also chimed with dialogical ethics (Frank, 2002).

It is considered good practice in qualitative research to gain informed consent to ensure that participation is taken up freely, without deception regarding the nature or purpose of the research (BSA, 2002). In designing the recruitment procedure, careful attention was therefore paid to participation being unforced and informed. Participants responded voluntarily to an advert (Appendix 1) placed in their children's school newsletter or sent to them by a gatekeeper. They were then sent an information form (Appendix 2) outlining the overall purpose of the research, where it might be published and what taking part would entail. The form made it clear that the information collected (the taped interviews, transcripts and personal information) would be kept confidential (in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998). It was also explained that their identity would be anonymised in the findings, in that their names, family names, and names of organisations/places of work would be changed or omitted. However, ethically, I felt I needed to explain that since I was using a life story approach, and using personal stories in the findings, it might be impossible to keep the participant's identity hidden from someone who would recognise them from their life stories relating to working and mothering. Whilst guidelines acknowledge that anonymity may not always be possible, researchers are guided to inform participants how far they will be afforded anonymity (BSA, 2002: p.2). Participants were encouraged to consider how likely it would be that anyone they knew would read the PhD or academic papers/books and if so, whether this would be a problem. They were also informed that they would have the opportunity to remove any potentially identifying details from the findings. As noted in section 4.3.2, steps were taken to avoid participants knowing each other. Being sensitive to the time being given up, the participants were given the option of either doing two sessions back-to-back or separately.

Participants were advised that they might find the experience of discussing motherhood and work distressing, either due to difficult past experiences being brought up in the storytelling, or due to causing them to worry about the future. Qualitative researchers are guided to make every effort to avoid or minimise harm to participants (BSA, 2002). The pilot study (MacGill, 2010) had also brought the possibility of this to my attention, with several participants becoming emotional and distressed during their storytelling, both in confronting the proximity of children leaving home and their lack of career progression. I was able to be particularly sensitive to these flashpoints during our sessions (see for example, Liamputtong, 2007). However, much of the storytelling was unprompted (and therefore what was brought up was not in my control), so it was important that participants were made aware of potential distress and notified of the availability of a list of organisations offering counselling or advice for parents, workers and relationships. In the event, five of the twenty participants did become highly emotional and distressed for a

short while during their storytelling. At the end of their sessions, I made sure I checked on their wellbeing, and all confirmed that overall they had found the experience positive and in many ways, cathartic.

The issue of power relations between researcher and participant was flagged as important ethically from both a dialogic and feminist perspective. Taking a life story approach and allowing unprompted storytelling as much as possible (see 4.4), gave the participant greater control than in a semi-structured interview, which is more directed by the interviewer. It also gave the participant an opportunity to speak freely, in words and stories of their own choosing, about their experiences. A participatory approach was intended to help minimise the power imbalance, protect anonymity and enable responsible representation of stories (see 4.6). Advising beforehand that they would have the opportunity to input was also meant to reassure and make participants as comfortable as possible about talking freely.

Dialogical ethical considerations influenced the approach taken to analysis and re-telling the stories (see 4.5). Dialogism firmly guards against categorising people, arguing that this can box people in, cutting down their future opportunities regarding identity and ignoring the 'unfinalizability' of identity construction (Frank, 2002, 2005, 2010). For this reason, stories, rather than people, were categorised. The notion of 'letting stories breathe' (Frank, 2010), extends from the storytelling sessions (where the implication is to allow for unprompted storytelling where possible) to the re-telling of the stories – where the implication is to allow the stories to speak for themselves as much as possible. Whilst it clearly was not possible to tell all twenty stories in detail, this did lead to Chapters 5 and 7 being committed to telling four participants' stories.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the process of generating and re-telling twenty life stories of part-time working mothers of teenagers. It explained how a dialogic theoretical perspective influenced the research design, as well as a feminist-inspired aim to understand the impact of sustained part-time working on mother-worker identities. Analysis was informed by dialogical narrative analysis (Frank, 2010) and dialogical dialectical theory (Baxter, 1990, 1996, 2004, Johnston and Swanson, 2007). The final sections paid attention to establishing research quality and ethical considerations for dialogical, feminist, life story research.

Chapter 5

Two stories of mothering (as a part-time worker)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises the mothering stories of Cara and Sam. These two stories are not intended to be 'typical'. Dialogic principles guard against categorising individuals, arguing that their construction of stories is ongoing and changes in different contexts. Rather, these two stories will be points of reference, against which to explore distinctions and resonances across the different stories (Ch.6). Cara and Sam's stories diverge in terms of the tension they describe early on and how they negotiated it. Cara's will illustrate engaging with a narrative of *struggle* in the early stages of managing caring and working, with attempts at *neutralising* tensions being somewhat unsatisfactory. Sam's will illustrate a narrative of *prioritization*, where she anticipated putting children first and *reframing* career expectations, helping reduce tension. As found across the stories, these two converge in the mothering of adolescents, where part-time working is no longer considered to be constraining their mothering or creating tension – but is positioned as *enabling* 'good' mothering of adolescents.

In re-telling Cara and Sam's stories, the aim has been to draw out the narrative threads relating to mothering and how these intersect with working. Rather than providing a comprehensive summary of experiences, the focus has been on illustrating the *work* of their stories (Frank, 2010) in relation to mothering, and the impact of sustained part-time working at different time/spaces: What is it they are justifying here? How are they positioning themselves and others in the story? What is the nub of any struggles or tensions?

5.2 Cara's mothering story

Cara currently works as a mid-senior level manager in Higher Education and also provides executive coaching privately. She has two sons, aged 15 and 19 and her husband is a structural engineer. This is how she opened her story in our first unprompted session:

When I was at University I couldn't stand being in a restaurant with small kids. I had no interest in other people's children or I just found them an irritation. So, I think for a lot of my twenties I wasn't really thinking about having children at all, and I was quite career focused I suppose... So between 25 and 30, I moved jobs three times and always progressive promotion and development. By the time I was 29, I was working for a management consultancy company which was quite a prestigious job for my age and it

was a big hike in pay and everything, and I was earning quite a bit more than my husband at that time I think... I worked jolly hard for it, I was all over the country and I was working every weekend, and I'd literally be doing 12 hour days most days. But I loved it really. I felt that I'd sort of reached a place that I felt really stretched and I was working with really bright people. Yeah I just felt like I'd found a place where I could input, where I could make a real contribution.

Cara began by stressing her disinterest in having children in her twenties and the progression and success she was having in her career as a management consultant. She had been with her partner since she was 18, and married him when she was 29. Later that year, her father died, and it was this loss of someone important in her life that she cited as encouraging 'a real sense of longing for a child'.

5.2.1 A 'vanished decade' of struggling with not 'being there' enough

Cara explained that once on maternity leave, she realised she wanted to return part-time. She had briefly discussed with her husband about him going part-time since she earned more, but he felt his company would never consider it. In the 'cut-throat' organisation she worked for, it was difficult to negotiate part-time working, and she was considered a 'pioneer' by her female colleagues. They finally agreed to 3 days a week for the first six months, but then wanted her back full-time. They compromised on 4 days and she 'stuck it there' until her son was almost three. When she first returned after maternity leave, she refers to the 'madness' of leaving her precious baby with a stranger, but simultaneously her sense of being back to 'me' at work and the contrast with the 'mind-numbing' side of mothering. In telling her story of her early days of being a working mother, she recalled:

I remember seeing a health visitor when he was quite young and she was asking about his feeding, and I said well he eats about 8 o'clock. 'That's far too late for a child of this age', she said. So again, I felt sort of, 'oh god, I'm doing it all wrong'. But there didn't seem to be any other way. There was no way I could leave work at 5 in the evening. It just wasn't what anybody did. Half the work got done in that late part of the day - you know, the talking, and planning. So, there were lots of moments where I just thought 'ohhhh'. It's just that sort of pressure, feeling that I couldn't do it well enough, feeling that I couldn't look after him well enough.

I remember another day when I was just parking my car at work and I saw a little child holding hands with her mother, and she was obviously wearing new shoes. She probably hadn't been walking that long, and I just remember her walking and looking at her shoes and feeling so chuffed and I just thought again, (my son) was that sort of age,

about a year, and I was thinking, I should be home with him. You know this is all wrong. What am I doing here? So, I had lots of, lots of inner torment. But I also loved the work, and when I was doing it I felt quite myself. So, yeah, just all that conflict really.

The *work* of her story during this stage is to depict the *struggle* she was having between the pressure of 'being there' for work and 'being there' for her young son. The storytelling suggests she felt guilty about not being a 'good enough' mother (reinforced by her health visitor's comments) and also felt she was missing out. But concurrently these feelings conflicted with a strong identification with and love for her work. Her early mothering story was told as an accumulative series of moments when she felt she was not doing well enough as a mother. Crisis points were expressed as times when she was unable to keep the two spheres separate. In particular she illustrated instances when the demands of work spilt over into time she was meant to be with her child.

A particular crisis point was after her son was ill and she took three weeks off work when it all became 'too much'. She ended up moving jobs to a public sector consultancy post in an attempt to reduce the pressure. Initially this was described as 'still stressful, but not so stressful', and easier culturally because there were other women with children. However, she was still working 4 days a week and working away some of the time. At this point she mentions how brilliant her husband had been 'through all of this', and that he had been the 'primary' carer during these first years. Although full-time, he worked locally and was able to do more dropping off and picking up.

Her second son was born when her elder son was four. She returned to work four days a week for several months, until she was 'on her knees' and negotiated down to three days. With a second child, four days were described as 'nearly full-time'. Again, looking back and making sense of where she has ended up, her story focused on moments where she felt guilty about not 'being there'. For example, she told a story of being away from home one night and phoning home. Her husband explained he had had trouble getting their younger son to sleep and had to put on her dressing gown and lie down beside him. She commented 'it's funny and I still remember it, but I can remember feeling quite sad, you know, I'm not there for him and the only way he can get him to sleep is for him to think I'm lying next to him...yes, mixed feelings'.

When the boys were six and two, she left her job during a restructure that would have meant moving to London. She took a 'compromise' job as a mid-level manager in Higher Education. This job was considerably less money, no car, a 'backward step' in terms of the nature of the work, but it was five minutes from home, regular (9-5ish) hours and not so much travelling. For two years, she worked full-time, but admitted that the work was

harder than expected, being a new post and working with demanding, postgraduate students. She moved to four days, but still the mothering stories are full of 'crisis points' and 'lots of little moments' where she felt bad. For example she told a story about being late to pick up her younger son from his first school disco.

I just couldn't get away from work and I was about 15 minutes late and he was holding another mother's hand, crying at the doorway of this church hall or whatever it was. He was absolutely sobbing and he said 'I thought you'd forgotten me'...You just feel absolutely terrible, and there have been quite a few, I think it's quite sad really, you tend to remember some of your worst moments as a mother... I just think, oh god, I'm just not doing this well enough. I can't even get away to pick him up at half past six, and here he is, sobbing at four years' old because I've let him down.

5.2.2 'Being there' for her young children: better late than never

Her story builds to a major crisis point in 2003 when her boys were aged ten and six.

Something has got to give, something is going to give, and the only thing I can actually choose is the job, isn't it? I can't choose for my marriage to fall apart and I can't choose to lose my marbles. The only thing I can choose is to reduce my hours. But, you know, it was a really big decision for me actually (her emphasis).

At this point, she mentioned she had been seeing a counsellor and that it took her a year to finally decide to cut her hours to two days. Whilst she suggested she struggled to do a 'professional' job in two days, she described an immediate release of tension regarding her mothering. She related how the boys commented on her being less stressed and saying 'yes' to having friends round or doing something spontaneously. Previously she had always had to go through the 'mental machinations' of working out whether she could fit these things in with her work, but now 'I felt that I finally had a bit of head space to plan to do things with them. You know, to take them and their friends somewhere or have a few friends round to stay, or do a little fun thing for them for Halloween'. Having time for the boys and doing 'more stuff' were related as evidence of 'good' mothering here. She remembered this as a period where she could be 'a bit more available to them'.

She described doing less as 'better for me, I think', that over this long period with children she had 'learnt to ease up a bit on myself'. But she was sad, looking back, that she 'just worked my ass off really' for the first decade and felt, like many of the men she had coached on careers, that she wished she had spent more time with her children.

I worry about that sometimes. I think I've got a very good relationship with them now, but I still feel a lot of those childhood years are a bit of a blur. I remember little bits and I remember some of those sad things... there's an awful lot that just blurs into, you, it's almost like a whole decade just vanished. Certainly, my eldest son, our relationship is good now, but I think in the early years he was his dad's boy, really because his dad did all the dropping off and picking up and things. He was quite close to his dad (long pause).

Cara ended this first unprompted story on a sad, regretful note regarding her early years of mothering. She had described the middle phase of mothering primary school children and the transition to secondary school, having cut back her hours, in a more positive way. But she focused less on this and more on her 'vanished' decade. The middle phase was therefore told through a narrative suggesting 'better late than never'. As she finished this first account, she was reflecting back on her story and it is from this perspective that she emphasised how much *she* missed out. There was also a suggestion that she almost jeopardised her relationship with her sons, but by 'being there', 'better late than never', she had invested time and thought she had a 'very good relationship with them now'.

5.2.3 'Being there' for teenagers: they still need me (and I need them)

At this point, I asked Cara how things were going now with her teenage children and she switched to a much more upbeat tone.

Obviously they get more independent at secondary school, so they need less of me....But I am glad that for some of their childhood anyway, I've worked less hours. I think it has just enabled me, I just feel more in touch with their lives. And, I can see, you don't know this when you've got younger children, that adolescents need you quite a bit too... But I love this age, these sort of adolescent years. I know people can be quite critical of adolescents but I just think they've been, I mean obviously we adore our kids, but they're such good company and they're so funny... So I'm glad that I've been around to spend some of that time with them. I'm not away so much now. Now, or for these last few years, it's been nice that sometimes when they come home from school I'm here. I haven't got much that I've got to do. I can just spend some time chilling with them.

Over the nine years since Cara cut back to two days she has gradually increased her hours back up to 3.5 days, which she covers as three long days. Her original mid-level job has been upgraded to a senior management role. She has two days at home, some of this time being spent doing private executive coaching. At this mothering stage, however, this level of part-time working is not, in her eyes, in conflict with 'being there' for her older children. Cara indicated that the requirement for 'good' mothering has shifted. She referred to her

children 'obviously' being more independent, but simultaneously, finding unexpectedly that they need you 'quite a bit too'. Rather than it being a problem her not being there 'enough', now she suggested that it has been 'nice' that she is sometimes there after school. 'Being there' is not about *doing* lots, but more about connecting, spending time 'chilling'. As well as positioning herself as 'holding her own' more as a mother, she also expressed how much she is enjoying the time spent with her sons and the relationship she now has with them. She contrasted this with a discourse of 'difficult' adolescents.

Earlier in her story she referred, rather wistfully, to the fact that her elder son was very close to his dad when he was little as her husband spent more time with him. He is now at University and she told a story about supporting him recently whilst his relationship with his girlfriend had been shaky. She stressed how pleased she was that she did now have a close connection – suggesting she was less likely to miss issues and he was able to turn to her when he needs to:

For a few weeks he was actually in quite a state. I think, these sort of things, if you haven't got your eye on the ball, you can miss it. I was quite touched, because when he was away he was on the phone to me quite a lot. I just thought, in a way it was a good feeling because it reminded me that, we have got a good relationship, you know, if he wants to confide in his mother with that sort of stuff. So I think although they're not nearly as dependent as they were, the fact that they're still quite emotionally connected is reassuring....I just feel, it feels like we've got to quite a good place really.

The work the story was doing through this time/space of mothering older children involved justifying why and how her teenage sons have still needed her to 'be there'.

The younger one finds (studying) more difficult and needs a bit more support. I want to be able to give him as much support as he needs. I don't want to go jumping off into some big job again, just because he is, on paper, nearly 16 and in theory can look after himself now. I don't think that is necessarily true. It's confusing. Adolescents need quite a lot of support really. In some ways they are different from younger kids who just sort of need clothing and getting to bed at a reasonable time, but older ones need a bit more emotional support, a bit more steering.

The reference to not wanting to 'go jumping off into some big job again' followed her reflecting on having been in the same job for 12 years, 'which I never thought I'd do'. She was considering changing her job now, but was wary of not having the mental capacity and emotional availability for her younger son. She had stayed 'because of the kids, really, because when you considered the various options, it always just seemed the better option

really'. She acknowledged the 'big impact having children has had on my career', but did not 'go on pursuing bigger jobs because it was self-evident really that I wasn't going to be emotionally robust enough, because I was too torn by the conflicting demands'. Despite, or perhaps because of the sacrifices she had made regarding her career, she said she did not want to risk the 'good' mothering of her younger son.

The accounts she chose to tell reflected that, for her, the teenage years have not all been plain sailing. For example, referring to her elder son in early adolescence:

During his sort of grumpy, monosyllabic period, I remember him being quite, well you know, we had our moments; he would swear at me or throw something at me. And I was just devastated really, because they'd been so lovely for so many years.

Cara indicated that this was fairly typical of early adolescence and that whilst it was devastating at the time, it did not rock her ingrained love for him, she continued to support him as best she could and this period had now passed.

She also discussed the tension between wanting to help, support and steer and simultaneously appreciating the need to let go, to allow her elder son to do things his own way. His approach to studying was a case in point. Once in the Sixth Form, he started attending school less and she initially felt very uncomfortable going off to work, leaving him lying in bed. However, she felt this was not something she could force and just because it was not the way she had approached studying, did not mean his way was wrong. She explained 'I just kind of had to let it go' and he did end up with good grades.

She suggested that her younger son had got into 'a few more scrapes'. She told a story about him getting drunk at just 13 and having to go to A&E. She described the shame she felt at the time: 'Those are the moments when you think 'Oh my God, is it all falling apart?'. However, she explained they were able to handle the situation calmly and discuss it with their son. They believed he learnt from the experience and there have been no more incidents like that.

Cara linked having invested in their relationship over the years and ensuring her sons fully appreciated her support with them being able to turn to her when they needed to:

This recent example where (older one) was obviously depressed about what has happened with his girlfriend, hopefully if you've put something in place over the years, which they know is very solid, about how you will come out for them in an emergency or you will support them.

They've had their scrapes, but they know we'll come out for them, not just come out for them physically, but be there for them whatever happens. I think that's, and so sometimes I just worry that I work too much.

The language used in these stories relating to adolescents shifted between 'I' and 'we'. There was more reference to 'parenting' at this stage. However, Cara positioned her *own* time as key to her close relationship with her sons, her being able to pick up on issues and them feeling fully supported. Her husband now worked 60+ hours per week, yet she concluded here that she still sometimes worried that *she* worked 'too much'.

5.2.4 Cara's mothering story: reflections

When we met up again Cara's first comment was that on reflection, she felt she had got her priorities wrong when the children were little. She suggested that 'work was absolutely central' and she had not adjusted to finding a balance. It was not that she felt the children were not well cared for, but more that she did not spend enough time enjoying them. This illustrates reflexive identity construction in action and how it is that telling a story from a different perspective can result in an alternative account of experiences. The *work* of her first unprompted storytelling focused on making sense of her *lack* of 'success' in her career. In this context, she unfolded her story as an accumulative series of crisis points where she was not there enough for her young children, thereby explaining the compromises she made, step by step, in her career. In hindsight, on reflecting on her mothering story as a whole, her reconstruction proposed that she had got her priorities 'wrong'. In this account, she contradicted her earlier version - where she had positioned her lack of presence as 'bad' mothering - by contending that 'it was not that her children were not well cared for', but rather that she had missed out.

She reflected that her mothering story almost had a 'completeness' about it, and from this perspective she was able to consider the outcome: 'I think overall it turned out well, if that doesn't sound too cheesy'. She related this to the absence of the 'tremendous problems' a lot of people have with teenage children, contrasting this with the relationship with her sons 'both of whom are my friends really and we get on well and we laugh together, and they're affectionate and funny and we enjoy spending time together'. She proposed that 'all of those things tell me that basically it probably turned out okay'.

Towards the end of her second session, Cara summed up the compromises she had made job-wise by working part-time: 'This job doesn't often challenge or stretch me and that's my frustration with it really. I traded interest and stretch and brain food for convenience,

reduced stress, geography, flexibility to work part-time'. She wrapped up by justifying this position she has ended up in:

What is it that I really want? Do I really want to be top of the tree in my organisation or do I want to know that I had some balance with parenting and bringing children up? Or do I want to hand the care of my children entirely to someone else while I go and achieve at work? And I think I sort of dipped a toe in almost a bunch of those places really.

On reflecting on her whole story, Cara presented this starker picture of the 'choice' she was faced with. In most of her story it was not as clear-cut as this. Here she was more direct about positioning those who 'want to be top of the tree' and 'achieve at work' as *not* having had 'some balance with parenting and bringing children up' and having handed the care of their children 'entirely to someone else'. In this way she represented it as a moral rationality. Her story overall suggested much greater compromises to her career than she had anticipated, but simultaneously, much greater enjoyment, particularly of parenting adolescents, than she had expected.

5.3 Sam's mothering story

Sam has two sons (now 20 and 18) and a daughter (14) and works at a small, local firm of architects. She opened her story by explaining that she was the daughter of an architect, was an architect herself and was married to an architect. She quickly noted, however, that this had not been her life-long ambition. Her interest in architecture developed during work experience at her father's practice. After five years training, her first job was in London. In 1989 she got together with husband and moved west. They married in 1991 and she fell pregnant unintentionally three months' later. She had been working for a firm doing 'exciting walkthroughs and things on the computer. It was really great. But when I had (eldest son), I stopped work for 6 or 9 months'.

5.3.1 Focusing on making work fit with 'being there' for her children

Until the boys were four and two, she was self-employed, doing part-time work for the practice her husband worked at. She talked of the guilt of leaving her elder son with her mum, how he screamed and how she felt he was too young to be left without her. Her parents moved away, and after her second son, her story turned to 'all that fitting in', using various child-minders and coping with a child who did not want to go to nursery. Concurrently she felt the pressure to work, as interest rates were high. Architecture was hit hard by the recession and it was difficult sustaining ad hoc part-time work. She decided to re-train as a Design and Technology teacher, thinking this 'would be the solution to all my problems'. She enjoyed it, but found she had under-estimated the hours

she was required to be at school before and after the school day, and felt 'it was always a compromise'. It was hard not being able to take time off easily for a sick child, for example. After her daughter was born, when the boys were six and four, she returned part-time, 'because I had three of them then'. But she found teaching part-time even more problematic because as the 'part-timer' she was given all the 'rubbish' classes with 'difficult' children who did not want to be there.

After a year or two, she was tempted back to architecture by a friend asking her to do a project. For several years she did small projects from home, before setting up in practice with her father, who had returned to the area. She described the six years working with him as a 'fun' period, where they were able to do some 'good' projects. Her story focused, however, on how well work fitted with caring for the children and the fact that 'my time was my own'. They covered each other when away and during the school holidays she took the children with her to their grandparents. Sometimes she had to work all weekend to get a spec done, but then her husband could help out. Mostly, it was 'quite successful', it was 'really, really flexible'.

Thinking her parents were moving away again, Sam moved to the small, local practice she has been working at for the last five years. She described this as 'good for me, a sharp learning curve', in particular citing being able to learn about sustainability from one of the partners. After hinting at greater fulfilment from her work, she resumed concentrating her story on the flexibility of her job. She reckoned over the past year she had been working at 0.85, mostly working every day from 8.30 to around four. While her second son was coming up to his A Levels, for example, she thought 'it was very important to be at home a bit at that time of day...that's when they'll tell you if they've had a really crap day or could you just make me a cup of tea or something'. But she had flexed this either when she felt she was needed more at home or when work was light, which had been beneficial to her employer too. This meant she could feel better about being absent when she wanted to be with her children. As her son's exams got closer, she tried to do extra short days – going in late, making sure he was up, possibly popping back at lunchtime 'with a nice goodies bag, to keep him on the up'. She rationalized this by saying '...I think it's quite difficult to revise if you're on your own all day. So if you know your mother is coming back in two and a half hours then maybe I'll do a bit of work then'.

Up until this point, her story had focused on how she had managed to make work fit with caring for her children. This has not all been easy, and involved considerable compromise to her work, particularly during the first decade. However, in comparison to Cara's story, she positioned herself as 'holding her own' regarding her mothering. Sam's story was

about adjusting, in order to 'be there', but was not constructed to stress tensions, crises and not 'being there' enough for her children.

5.3.2 Prioritising 'being there' for her children

Sam shifted her attention to how she felt now about work. She talked about rewarding aspects of working as an architect, in particular the satisfaction of a happy client. 'I love my spaces. I love light and air. If I can instil that in people's projects, and give them a bit of a wow factor, then that is really satisfying. It is good'. She mentioned that she had been made an Associate recently, which was 'very nice of them'. They work closely as a small team, with little hierarchy. This was, however, couched within the context of being a small practice, where the scope of projects was limited. She could not see herself moving to another job, thinking this would be difficult at her age (50). She was concerned about the partners retiring when she still needed to work, as she would not want to run the practice by herself. 'But I'm not so ambitious' she said at this point, continuing:

I know other people that both have full time jobs and are always feeling compromised by either having to take time off because of children or feeling they are not there enough for their children. You just have to make a decision, don't you? You take your choice. I'd much rather have been around for them and gone to the school plays and all that. I consider myself quite lucky that I've been in a profession where that's been possible.

In this account, whilst Sam described working hours as a 'choice', there appears to be a moral impulse to her justification. Her part-time 'choice' was positioned as having 'been around for them', in contrast to mothers choosing to work full-time 'feeling they are not there enough for their children'.

Over this long period of working part-time, Sam's husband's career had progressed considerably and he was now in a senior position in a larger architect's practice. She, perhaps inevitably, compared her position to his:

I don't think I'm that sort of, I don't think I'd want that kind of responsibility, having a team of 30 people being dependent on me... I don't think I could be an effective mother at home, worrying about them, and then worrying about the other things as well. But if my job allows me to earn a good salary and be satisfying to a sort of extent, then I've enough, that's plenty for me. I don't think I'm that ambitious a sort of person.

Following the narrative thread, the *work* of her story is positioning herself as someone who felt obliged to prioritise mothering – she argued that she 'personally' could not have

worked at a higher, managerial level *and* been an ‘effective’ mother. Distancing herself from ambition was part of justifying her acceptance of a less demanding position, although her reference to it being ‘enough’ for her if her job is ‘satisfying to a certain extent’ perhaps indicates a little tension. She did then briefly mention an earlier achievement whilst training:

...I got Highly Commended in some RIBA competition and I did think, (whispering) ‘maybe this is the start of a grand career?’ As soon as I had (elder son), I just, my priorities just completely altered. They are my priorities and everything else comes second and now my job comes second to them. That’s just a biological fact of me, I think.

In this way, she positioned the change in her priorities immediately on becoming a mother as ‘natural’. She explained that she had always wanted to have children, since she was about 18. At this point, she switched briefly to justifying why she did not stay at home all the time early on. She suggested she would have gone ‘stir crazy’, that she had always assumed she would work, and that she had ‘got to get out and do something for myself, got to have that side of your life that is very different to their needs’. Suddenly at this point she dropped in ‘I wish I’d been a mid-wife’. She said she really liked architecture, but she loved babies. She suggested that if her husband had not wanted a family, she would have ended their relationship.

Sam represented herself as loving her pregnancies, and really enjoying her early years as a mother. She told of her elder son having to have surgery as a very young baby and then suffering from colic, and her younger son really hating going to nursery. Nonetheless, she positioned herself as very much holding her own as a mother, and described these as ‘very happy times’. She ‘found it easy to fill the day with entertainment’ with her two young sons. The routine had to be fairly ‘rigorous’ to manage logistically, but she had a ‘wonderful support network’ in her village. Her husband was also very supportive in the evenings and weekends, when she would sometimes go back to studying for her PGCE, preparing lessons or later specs. Sam did not include in her stories of early mothering accounts where she did not feel good enough as a mother, as Cara had.

5.3.3 ‘Being there’ for teenagers: they still need me (and I need them)

Turning her attention to being a mother of teenagers, Sam suggested that ‘they need you in different ways’. She explained that in primary school, they needed you more physically, for cuddles, taking them to things after school, watching them at rugby matches. Then

they go through a phase towards the end of primary school, particularly boys, where they say less ('talk to the hand') and physical affection outside the home is forbidden.

But when they're teenagers, they still need you to be at home, they still want you just to be around, and then when they're ready, it will come out. You'll sort of be making tea or cooking supper, and then (quietly) 'this happened today'. It's only if you just happen to be around and it's just the humdrum of everyday, then they say the thing that's bothering them, or something happened... They've always been pretty good at communicating with us. There are no kinds of barriers. But it doesn't get to teenage years and then they just suddenly don't need you at home anymore.

Echoing Cara, Sam's account suggested that the need shifted from physical presence to emotional availability. Communication was considered key at this stage, but it could not be forced. In her story, teenagers had to feel ready, and this quite often happened when it was just the 'humdrum' of everyday. She continued:

They kind of need you at home almost more, I've found. With (daughter), certainly. Girls, they have terrible arguments at school and it all gets terribly kind of, you know... She had a few very vicious years at year 7 and 8. Friendship groups would turn horrible. She would come home and need to vent it all. She wanted to do it when it was just me. Sometimes not with (husband) there.

The time just after school was highlighted – a time to unburden issues that had happened that day, and sometimes it was best when it was just her around.

I just think they need you around more. If there is a girlfriend issue or something, I can tell if something is not right and I have to make myself available. You make yourself available and maybe they won't say anything. You keep making yourself available, like, do you want to go for a walk? So you go for a walk and then about half way round (whispers something). But if you're at work all the time and you only come home at 7 in the evening and it's supertime and there's too much going on and something is on tele, then they never get a chance to vent it. So it is making those opportunities.

Sam positioned providing emotional support as requiring the awareness and capacity to pick up on issues and making herself available. It could not be rushed. She suggested opportunities might be limited if you are working 'all the time' and 'only come home at 7'.

Sam went on to relate how she worked very closely with her husband on parenting, proposing that this stemmed back to her 'very communicative relationship with (her) parents'. She described him as having a 'very open relationship' with the children and that

they communicated well. He both played and watched various sports with them – he had ‘come into his own once they could do more’. Sam mentioned meal times as important, stating her firm belief that they should organise to eat together, since that was where they had the best conversations. Her husband worked long hours, but his office was close-by, so he was usually home for 7.30pm. He was also able to be flexible. For example, the previous week he had taken their son to his driving test.

When asked about the highs and lows of mothering teenagers, Sam focused almost entirely on the highs. She had really enjoyed the shift to adult conversations. She loved seeing them finding things they really enjoyed and doing well at these – for example, her elder son’s passion for music and the fact that he was now studying sound engineering. Also, appreciating them growing in confidence and ‘enjoying being in their own skin’ – for example, her younger son getting through his phase of feeling he was ‘rubbish at things’, finding out in the 6th Form that he was in fact dyslexic, and seeing his confidence soar through excelling at cricket and skiing. The fact the three children still wanted to come on family holidays was ‘a testament to we’re obviously not too bad as parents’. Similar to Cara, Sam placed a close relationship with her children as core to succeeding as a parent. Her language had also shifted to include ‘we’ more often at this stage, but like Cara, she argued that her part-time working in a less demanding role enabled ‘good’ mothering, by allowing *her* to have the emotional wherewithal to support her teenage children.

5.3.4 Sam’s mothering story: reflections

At the end of Sam’s second session, I asked her if there was anything that surprised her about how things had turned out. She answered ‘no’, but went on to refer again to the architectural competition she had done well in, and said that just sometimes she did think ‘What if?’ But she put this down to ‘the grass is always greener’ and was quick to reiterate that she was not actually sure she had the ‘kind of killer instinct to be some sort of, you know, driven, everything else is by the wayside’. She said she was not the ‘type of woman’ for whom ‘that goal of running that multi-million pound business...is just the be-all and end-all and that’s what I want to do and children will be looked after by other people’. Like Cara, in this final justification, going all out for work was associated with handing over the care of your children to others. In this way Sam presented it as a moral ‘choice’.

But reading back on it I was just thinking ‘did I really think that when I got that commendation?’ But I suppose for a fleeting moment, I did, and thought, you know, ‘I could just be - this could be the way ahead’. But then at the end of the day, I don’t know. Family life’s just so important, and it did – as soon as (elder son) came along, it just took second place, and my priorities changed. Yeah. As long as I can enjoy what I’m

doing and be good at it, and clients enjoy working with us, and it's good, and we make a difference, then I'm quite happy with that.

A suggestion of tension relating to career compromise lurks in these closing words.

However, Sam repeated once more that her priorities had changed once she became a mother. It was still important for her to gain fulfilment from work, but this she *reframed* as being able to enjoy what she did, be good at it and do a good job – rather than gaining in career status and profile. She maintained that for *her*, 'family life came first'.

5.4 Conclusion

Cara and Sam's stories provide points of reference from which to discuss the variations in tension and convergence in the stories as they progressed. These two stories bring to life the complexity of intersecting discourses, how these are experienced differently dependent on individual contexts, and the shifting nature of these discourses and experiences in different time/spaces. As such, they cannot be described as 'typical', but do illustrate different starting points in levels of tension.

Cara's mothering story was told as a 'success' story in terms of ending up in a good place, but this was contrasted with considerable tension and many, accumulative crisis points early on. This led to compromises to her job in attempts to *neutralise* the tension, but left her concluding that she was still not there enough for her young children during her 'vanished decade'. From a narrative point of view, the main *work* of Cara's first unprompted story was to depict her *struggle* early on trying to 'be there' for both work and children – thereby justifying her step-by-step compromises in career and making sense of where she had ended up. She emphasised her struggle to *separate* the two by recounting crises that always related to overspill. In terms of impact on her mothering, she maintained that the demands of her work constrained her ability to 'be there' for her children when she felt she needed to, or meant she was overly stressed when she was with them. Whilst also indicating that overspill occurred the other way, on reaching a crisis point and feeling 'something had to give', she felt 'the only thing I can choose is the job'.

Sam's mothering story was also told as a 'success' story, but there was less tension apparent. The prominent narrative she drew on was that of *prioritisation*. She suggested anticipating becoming a mother and prioritising caring for her children over her career. By suggesting this was a natural 'choice', she also positioned it as a moral 'choice'. Sam's story was characterised by a sense of her 'holding her own' as a mother. Part of prioritising caring for her children meant *reframing* what her career meant to her and her

expectations. Achievement was *reframed* as being able to enjoy her work and do a 'good' job, rather than progress to more senior positions in more high-profile practices.

It still took time and effort for Sam to adjust and find a way to make work fit practically, and she too used a narrative of *struggle*, from time to time. However, when she found herself struggling with paid work and caring for children, it seems that having *reframed* her career expectations, it was easier to accept adjustments to her work arrangements to fit better with 'being there' for her children. Similarly, Cara also drew on a *prioritisation* narrative periodically – whenever her struggle reached a crisis point, she ended up prioritising 'being there' for her children and compromised her job. However, since Cara had not *reframed* how she felt about work and career expectations to the same extent, it seems she found *neutralising* the tension through compromise somewhat dissatisfying and harder to accept.

The two stories converged as they reached the phase of mothering adolescents. Both mothers suggested they found themselves feeling they still needed to 'be there' for their adolescent children, although this was unanticipated. Both indicated a shift in what was perceived as 'good' mothering. At this stage, the emphasis was on being available to provide emotional support, and the mothers constructed sustained part-time working as *enabling* 'good' mothering, rather than constraining or creating tension. In particular, they held that having some time after school at home with their children was important. This was unhurried, everyday time where they could pick up on issues and make themselves available, and where their teenage children could chat or vent any issues, without it being forced. By being available, but not overly focused on their children, they suggested they were best placed both to provide support but also to enable independence. Cara and Sam maintained that by being a significant presence in their children's lives, their children felt able to turn to them if needed. They cited their children still wanting to spend time with them and them having a close relationship as evidence of things having 'turned out well' with regards to their mothering.

Whilst the two mothers now recognised the negative impact of sustained part-time working on their career, part of the rationale they gave for not going back to a full-time 'career' focus, was that they neither wanted to 'miss out' on nor risk 'messing up' these last few years with their children at home. By this stage, Cara's story resonated with Sam's in suggesting her priorities in life had shifted.

Chapter 6

More stories of mothering (as a part-time worker)

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the key findings illustrated through Cara and Sam's stories are discussed in relation to the other eighteen stories. Distinctions and resonances are highlighted and certain aspects are investigated in more depth. Whilst individually, stories shifted and progressed in different ways, there were two main time/spaces in the mothering stories. The first section (6.2) focuses on the first time/space, exploring the divergent levels of tension found in the way the early mothering stories were set up and framed (taking into account that this is told from the perspective of making sense of where they have ended up). Cara and Sam's stories provide points of reference at either end of the spectrum. The second section (6.3) turns to the time/space of mothering older children and 'justifying' *still* being in part-time employment. Again, Cara and Sam's stories act as reference points, illustrating the convergence in the stories and allowing for nuances to be explored in more depth. Firstly, the perceived shift in children's needs as they become adolescent will be covered and how 'good' mothering of older children was therefore described (6.3.1). This links to how sustained part-time working was positioned as *enabling* 'good' mothering of older children (6.3.2). Section 6.4 considers resonances in the positioning of sustained part-time working as good for a mother's wellbeing too.

6.2 Becoming a mother and working part-time: divergent levels of tension

Looking across the twenty stories, the degree of tension seems to depend on how a number of factors came together – both practical and socio-ideological, and relating both to working and mothering. How these coincided differed according to individual circumstances, but certain experiences and perspectives on discourses and ideology were more likely to be part of a narrative of *struggle*, the prominent narrative in Cara's early mothering story and others, part of a narrative of *prioritisation*, the main narrative framing Sam's early mothering story. Distinctions in tension will be examined, relating to work/career (6.2.1 – outlined here in relation to early mothering stories, and covered in more detail in Chapters 7 & 8) and then to caring for children (6.2.2), before examining how experiences, discourse and ideology were negotiated using the two narratives (6.2.3).

6.2.1 Distinctions in levels of tension relating to work and career

Practically, the stories suggested varying levels of tension arising dependent on the nature of the participant's work, role and organisational culture and how easy it was to work

flexibly and/or reduced hours. Cara's story, for example, illustrated the difficulties of trying to work part-time in a demanding management consultant role, for an organisation expecting 100 percent commitment and availability from its workers. She struggled with the long hours, travel and stressful nature of the work and keeping this separate and not conflicting with 'being there' for her children. Three mothers who worked in TV when they first went part-time similarly emphasised the nature of their job and organisation heightening their struggle to avoid the spheres of working and caring for children clashing – despite having gone part-time. These were Paula (now a school administrator), Sharon (now a multi-media consultant & trainer) and Sara (recently gone freelance as a TV producer)¹⁹. Sara's story will be told in detail in the next chapter, vividly illustrating the difficulties of working part-time in such a demanding culture – both practically, but also in terms of the struggle between experience and perceived expectations of progression and a discourse of 'part-timers' being less competent and committed. Jessica experienced both flexible and inflexible cultures within local accountancy firms – the flexibility in one firm was put down to her boss's wife running a local nursery and thus his appreciation of childcare issues. Sam's story, once she had settled back into architecture, focused on how well her flexible working fitted with caring for her children. It provides what appears to be an excellent illustration of flexibility working for both an employee and employer (helping alleviate any guilt regarding child-related absence).

Three mothers (Karen, Di and Deb) suggested they had never been particularly ambitious and this had made it easier to cut back to part-time working and accept any compromise this might entail, as for example Sam did. However, an emphasis on not being career-minded or becoming less so after children could also be the result of resisting the discourse of 'career as progression' and reframing over time how they could achieve fulfilment from work, without climbing a ladder. This will be explored in Chapters 7 & 8, as will the indication of a link between certain educational experiences and a stronger sense of career expectation. However, the stories of early mothering tended to concentrate on finding ways to make work fit around 'being there' some of the time for their children, with the focus of any tension being on mothering expectations, whilst 'career' appeared to be 'on hold'.

Many of the stories suggested a lack of planning regarding how they would manage work and motherhood. Every participant had assumed they would return to work. Judith (occupational therapist) did not return for a few years but this was put down largely to moving house twice and then having a second baby. Some had anticipated wanting to

¹⁹ I will reference a participant's job (current/past) and/or children where appropriate to the discussion in hand.

work part-time, but quite a number reported only deciding while they were on maternity leave, like Cara. Not having anticipated wanting or needing to work part-time could add to the tension, since this meant they had not prepared mentally for compromise, nor properly planned their part-time working.

Four participants went back full-time initially, but ended up taking career breaks before returning to work part-time. For Denise (working in Heritage Services, promoted to Head of Department after her return), Paula (then a TV producer) and Charlotte (marketing manager), it was the arrival of their second child that led to feeling things were unravelling and/or that they could no longer manage both. They chose to step back from professional life when things reached a crisis, and *select* motherhood, rather than compromising on their career. However, all three, following a career break, then returned to work in lower level, and for two of them, administrative jobs. Carol's (at the time, a lecturer) career break was prompted by a move abroad due to her husband's job.

Participants' stories often involved step-by-step compromises in the hours, status and nature of their jobs, particularly over the early years of mothering, as illustrated so vividly in Cara's story. Again, these experiences will be examined in much more detail in Chapters 7 and 8. In the context of this chapter on mothering identity, it is pertinent to note that it was invariably their strong belief that they needed to 'be there' for their children, in person, that was cited as the core reason for cutting back and/or stepping back in their working life.

6.2.2 Distinctions in tension relating to caring for children

There are distinctions in the stories relating to 'choosing' and managing childcare and networks of childcare support that can compound or alleviate tension regarding how they felt about their mothering. These will be outlined first, in terms of fitting practically with their paid work and also with respect to mothering ideology and discourse – in particular, how they felt about childcare as a replacement for them as a mother. Then attention will be paid to the shifting tensions that arose from, often unanticipated, changing childcare needs. This section will conclude with an exploration of distinctions in tension relating to identifying as 'maternal' – or not – and how this impacted on their perceptions of the requirement for them to 'be there'.

Finding childcare that could accommodate long-working hours, particularly with a certain amount of flexibility for early starts, late finishes, and changes in days/hours (either for work reasons or sick children) was reported as highly problematic from the start. Gabby (in-house barrister at the time) indicated that her 'choice' to go part-time was not really a

choice, because her husband was out of the country at least 12 weeks of the year, and 'even a nanny doesn't accommodate full-time legal working hours'. Nannies were only used by two of the four mothers who initially returned full-time, and by one mother, Delia (dentist), as a nanny-share for one afternoon. Sara (TV producer) had enlisted the help of au pairs, who had given her an 'invaluable' five hours help a day, over eleven years.

Mostly others used nurseries or child-minders or a mixture of the two. Several mothers extended their maternity leave, just not feeling ready to leave their babies with someone else. Three mothers had intended to use nurseries, but changed their minds at the last minute. Di (tax consultant), for example, described her son's 'long face' and the indifference of his sixteen-year-old carer on a trial day and how she felt she could not leave him there. She chose instead to use a child-minder, although when she had initially thought about it, 'I didn't want him to go to one person because I didn't want him to be attached to one person and not me'. The social side of nurseries was often cited as a reason why mothers felt it was a good thing for their children – certainly when they were older pre-schoolers, in preparation for school. However, managing taking and picking up for short sessions could be difficult, and some indicated stress if they felt their child did not enjoy it.

Carol (full-time lecturer at the time) was extremely appreciative of her own mother who resigned her job and came to look after her first son. She admitted not really having thought about how childcare would be managed whilst she worked. Several others were able to call upon mothers or mothers-in-law to help out, like Sam. Many, however, had parents living too far away to help day to day, or parents were elderly or unwell.

Two participants *shared* childcare with their husbands who also worked part-time. Joanna (health visitor) worked two days one week and three days the next, as did her husband, for eight years. She did tell her early mothering story as one of 'struggle', but related this to the 'very high expectations' she had of herself as a mother, driven she thought by her work as a health visitor. She had not been sure she wanted to have children, having had a difficult relationship with her father and distant one with her mother, and had been with her husband fifteen years before having her first child at thirty-six. She indicated that childcare was not a struggle because it was shared with her husband. Steph (campaigner in a human rights organisation at the time) unusually did not feel she was compromising initially when she returned to work part-time, as she was offered a job-share that was a promotion. She was 'appalled' by the first nursery she saw and she and her husband shared all the childcare between them for the first year, before finding a much more homely nursery they felt comfortable with. She and her partner have continued to share

caring for their daughters with both working part-time. She described this co-parenting as having been 'fantastic' for the girls.

Two further participants described their partners as taking on significant caring roles. These were Cara (5.2) and Susannah (then a broadcast correspondent). Both worked in very demanding work cultures and had partners who were able to be more flexible, although they worked full-time. Susannah was the main wage earner and went back to work on three-quarters' of a working week, whilst her husband, who worked freelance, looked after the children a lot for the first few years, with a little bit of nursery care. She described herself as 'very, very happy' that it was her husband who was at home looking after the children, rather than someone else. However, similar to Cara, this did not alleviate her personal struggle between being there for her career and her children.

Whilst there were stresses regarding finding childcare that both offered the hours they required and that they felt comfortable with in terms of the level of care, most participants reported settling into some sort of initial routine that more or less worked. However, a second maternity leave and then managing two children at different stages often created significant stress and a requirement to readjust. Once the eldest went to primary school, there was the issue with what to do after school. Again, there was a sense of not necessarily having anticipated this, and only really recognising a sense of needing to 'be there' after school when it came about. Attitudes to after-school clubs were mixed. Most mothers used them for an afternoon or two, but there appeared to be a sense of any more than that would be 'dumping' their children – already being at school from 9-3 was considered 'enough'. Delia (dentist) told a story of taking her daughter to 'tea club' for the first time, and only realising when she picked her up that she was the only little one staying all afternoon. She referred to this 'tea club incident' several times, pinpointing it as a moment of realisation that she could not leave her daughter there three afternoons until 6, so she would have to cut back her hours further:

I think that was the first time I actually thought, right (daughter) has got to come first. Because, while they were at the nursery long hours, I could get on with my job. That was brilliant. But then I suddenly thought, okay, they are going to be small for a very short time. Something is going to have to give here... Some of the children were going every day to early drop-off at 8 o'clock and then tea club and I just couldn't do it. I don't know whether the children suffered or not, but I kind of felt I didn't want my children doing that.

Trying to manage and negotiate part-time hours that fitted with dropping and picking up from school turned out for many to be more difficult than pre-school when they could

organise full day childcare. Many of the stories included similar moments of tension, reporting them as moments of 'realisation' that further adjustment, and often further compromise, was required.

Having a network of support that could provide ad hoc childcare helped enormously, as many participants mentioned incidences where it was difficult for them to be there – a sick child, an unexpected meeting, being held up, or an after-school activity being cancelled. Sam not only had her parents nearby for many of the early years, and a husband working locally who was able to be fairly flexible, she also had a good network of friends and neighbours in her village. Janey (vet) similarly, had a very good network in her village. Several others mentioned having friends they could call upon. Di (tax consultant) ended up sharing childcare and school/nursery ferrying for a while with a friend with similar aged children. Some were able to call on friends made through toddler groups or mothers of their children's primary school friends, where they tended to have reciprocal, loose agreements to help each other out. Cara, on the other hand, had no network beyond her child-minder and husband, but they would not necessarily be available. Several other mothers felt they too had few people they could call on.

In a few stories, in a similar vein to Sam, participants described mothering as 'natural' or 'instinctive' to them, something they had always wanted to be, that once they had children it was only 'natural' that they prioritised mothering. The three who most obviously positioned themselves in this way were Delia (dentist), Karen (sales & marketing) and Di (tax consultant). All three also stated that they were not career-minded, as Sam did. Three of the four (Sam, Karen and Di) had three children.

This compared to a greater number who, like Cara, made some reference to *not* being such a maternal type. This took different forms. This could be that they had not wanted or not been 'fussed' (Tanya) about having children and they linked not having a 'natural' instinct with not being maternal. For example, Teresa (HR) recounted:

It's interesting, the first thing I say to anybody when they ask me about being a mother is that I'm not particularly maternal (laughing). I was never one of those people who couldn't resist other people's babies...I'm not naturally a sort of child-obsessed person. In fact when (husband) and I were younger, we did think that we probably wouldn't have children, and then got to a certain age and we wanted them.

Some linked this to poor relationships with their own mother. Steph (campaigner at the time) talked of the 'dreadful' relationship she had with her mother, and how the decision to have children was 'neither automatic nor easy'. It is interesting to note the complete

absence of Cara's mother in her story, in comparison to most of the other stories. She mentioned only briefly in her second interview that they were not close.

Not being a 'maternal type' could be linked to finding the early stages of childcare difficult, often the toddler stages in particular (e.g. Judith), or that they had not seen themselves as 'very good' at playing with young children (e.g. Sara). These mothers were perhaps more likely to refer to elements of early mothering as boring or un-stimulating. However, even positioning themselves as 'naturally' maternal could, as we saw with Sam, refer to mothering as 'boring' in the way they justified their separate identity at work being important to them, and *reframing* time away as making them more patient mothers. Furthermore, those referencing not being maternal in some way invariably went on to emphasise the importance of 'being there' for their children themselves. Judith (occupational therapist) described falling pregnant at 39 as a 'shock' and feeling that it was 'the end of my life'. Despite this and the fact that she felt bored and trapped at home, she still felt compelled to be with her son and not 'palm him off'.

6.2.3 Narratives of *struggle* and *prioritisation*

Cara's story illustrated the prominent use of a narrative of *struggle* in her early mothering story and what she described as her 'vanished decade', whereas Sam depicted a story framed predominantly by a narrative of *prioritisation*. In the preceding sections I have drawn out from across the stories distinctions in levels of tension between employed work and career, and caring for children. The ways in which these experiences, discourses and ideology intersected and were negotiated differed, dependent on individual circumstances. Nonetheless some patterns with regards to the use of narratives of *struggle* and *prioritisation* can be deduced.

All the participants appeared to demonstrate adherence to the central tenet of intensive mothering ideology (Hays, 1996), with regards to a belief that they needed to 'be there', in person, for their children. This was whether they identified themselves as having always been a 'maternal type' or not. At the same time, however, all the women assumed that they would return to work and all indicated that working was an important part of who they were. Interestingly there was scant justification in the stories about going back to work. Needing to 'be there' for their children was the main rationale given for going part-time, but there appeared to be little requirement for them to justify why they were not at home all the time. Occasionally mothers *reframed* time away from children as being beneficial to their mothering, making them more patient and fresh for the task. But the *work* of the stories tended to be oriented towards justifying why they went and stayed part-time, rather than maintaining a full-time career. Looking across the stories it is likely

that their university education - building expectations of a life-long career - played a part in this justification, as did the fact that their stories are being told from the perspective of making sense of where they have ended up and their perceived lack of career 'success'.

The major distinctions in tension, and thus the distinctions in whether they gravitated towards a narrative of *struggle* or *prioritisation* to describe this early phase of mothering, appear to focus around how they felt about compromises made to their jobs, in order to make them fit with caring for children. It is likely that how they felt about the impact of any compromises on their 'career' longer term and where they have ended up will also have affected how they told their stories of early mothering and working (identification with 'career' and how this changed over time will be central to the next two chapters). In the previous section, three further mothers (Karen, Di, and Delia, working in sales and marketing, as a dentist, and as a tax consultant), in addition to Sam (architect, 5.2), were identified as positioning themselves as 'naturally' maternal and less ambitious, and thus predominantly using a *prioritisation* narrative in their stories of early mothering. Within this narrative, accepting any compromise to work/career came more easily. By identifying as 'naturally' maternal, they suggested they had therefore *anticipated* planning for motherhood, and part-time working had been part of this plan. The relationship between the two had been *reframed*, giving priority to mothering.

A narrative of *struggle* highlighted conflict between paid work and caring. This seemed to be used where there was a strong association with 'career' and practicalities of work and managing childcare meant individuals felt compelled to cut back hours and step down in status more than they really wanted to and/or had anticipated doing. This lack of planning for and anticipation of often step-by-step compromises was a core element of this narrative, as was the prominence of demanding and inflexible work cultures. These were true of three of the mothers (Paula, Denise and Charlotte, at the time working as TV producer, manager in Heritage Services and marketing manager) who initially went back full-time, and then opted for a career break when things became too much after their second child, thereby *selecting* motherhood for a while, rather than accepting compromise. Several further mothers (Susannah, Gabby and Sara, at the time correspondent, lawyer and TV researcher respectively), like Cara (management consultant – 5.2), tended to tell their early stories following a narrative of *struggle*. When a crisis arose or issues with managing work and childcare built up and they felt compelled to compromise to *neutralise* the tension, they did not compromise 'being there' for their children any further, or indeed doing a 'good' job for their employer. They compromised their own standing by, for example, cutting back hours further or removing themselves from opportunities to progress, and/or they compromised their satisfaction by opting for work that fitted, which

was not always the work they would have preferred to do. This was often constructed as their only 'option' and whilst such a response did help *neutralise* the tension between the two spheres, they could experience dissatisfaction with the compromise.

Participants themselves seemed aware of these distinct narratives for part-time working mothers. Susannah (correspondent at the time) illustrated this well in her story. During her second pregnancy, she was 'more or less' offered a job that would have been a 'natural progression', would have put her 'more or less top of the tree in the career path I was on', and that she had been 'devastated' not to get during her first pregnancy. But she turned it down, because 'I realised it wasn't going to fit in with my life any more'. This, she said was 'quite a shock to a lot of people and mainly to me' – the realisation that she had just 'shot her career plan out of the window'. She proceeded to describe her colleagues going in two directions once they had children – those who 'almost sadistically' did not allow having children to change the way they worked, and those who prioritised mothering as their 'main job' and work became 'secondary'. Her feelings towards the latter were ambiguous:

In a way I wish I could be that sort of person...they very much went down the lines of this work is great and I'm good at it, but I'm not going to give the pound of beef that I used to, because my main job is being a mother. So I never quite went that far and you really, really struggle with part of you being jealous of that, that you're not in that place. And a little bit of even you in the dark corners, not respecting those women, when you've got your career hat on, which I think is appalling and I hate saying out loud, and part of you being really proud that you're managing to do both. They manage to do both, but in a very different way.

'Othering' (categorising and then using as a point of comparison) was thus happening in the stories not just in relation to full-time working mothers, who were positioned as having prioritised careers and handing over the care of their children to others, but in and between part-time working mothers. Susannah illustrated both her lack of anticipation regarding career compromise and the struggle she had to accept this compromise – she was simultaneously jealous of and disparaging towards women whom she perceived more easily accepted compromise.

The remaining nine mothers seemed to use a combination of the two narratives, weaving between the two, dependent on the perspective they were talking from and thus the *work* their story was doing from a particular time/space in their story. Again, it is important to note that where they have ended up career-wise and how they feel about that is likely to have impacted on how they tell their early story. For many, the recognition of the compromises they were making only came gradually – they often made these step by step,

and rarely anticipated that they would *sustain* their part-time working in the way they did. In several of these stories specific individual circumstances also appeared to play a part in why career or job compromise had to be accepted. For example, both Judith (occupational therapist) and Tanya (nurse) cited chronic illness resulting in fatigue as a major factor holding them back from taking on more work demands. Carol (lecturer at the time) had gone back full-time after their first child, but took a career break when her husband's job took them abroad. Janey had had a life-long ambition to be a vet and co-owned a veterinary practice. After years of trying for children, and many attempts with IVF, when she finally, unexpectedly fell pregnant at 37, her response was to sell her business, since she could not imagine being able to continue to share the work equably with her business partner. When her children were still very young, she was also constrained from taking on too much work because both her parents also required her care.

6.3 Mothering older children and justifying still working part-time

I will turn now to investigate the time/space of 'being there' for older children and justifying *still* working part-time where there was much greater resonance across the stories. First I will explore the moral rationalities of why and how they suggest their children still needed them (6.3.1). As illustrated by Cara and Sam's stories, the nature of their children's needs had changed as their children had grown, and indeed continued to change over the course of adolescence. Section 6.3.2 will explain how it was that participants proposed that their sustained part-time working meant that they were best placed for 'good' mothering of older children.

6.3.1 Being a 'good' mother: older children's needs

All the participants suggested that they still needed to 'be there' for their teenage children. This was central to their rationalisation for why they *still* needed to work part-time and/or in work that was not spilling over into the space they felt they required for their children. The stories echo Sam's description of a shift over time from mothers focusing on physical care to providing emotional availability. They concentrate predominantly on their children's need for emotional support as they negotiate the ups and downs of adolescence. Despite the prevalence of a discourse of hormonal, emotional and difficult adolescents, most participants had not anticipated still needing to be around after school at this stage. They had mostly assumed that they would not be needed 'as much' and would probably return full-time once the children were 'older'. All had an elder child transitioning to secondary school whilst a younger one was still at primary school. As I will illustrate, they suggested that as they reached that stage they realised their children still needed them around, at least some of the time after school.

6.3.1.1 Growing independence and not being needed as much physically

Part of why they had not anticipated being needed so much was an expectation that secondary school children would be more independent. This growing independence was borne out by the accounts and the transition to secondary school tended to be a key marker. Certainly by secondary school, children were almost always making their own way to and from school and mothers were happy to leave them at home for short periods of time on their own. Indeed, leaving them on their own a bit was not just acceptable, but constructed as 'good for them', in terms of starting to learn to be independent and look after themselves. Once their youngest was at secondary school, this generally meant the stress around getting to school for pick-up, often reported in the stories, had gone. Also children leaving early to take themselves to school and getting home later slightly released the constraint to working hours. As we saw with Sam, it was possible to work from 8.30 to 4.30 and still be mostly at home when her children were. If a mother was held up at work, needed to pop out to Sainsbury's or take the dog for a walk, her children's welfare was no longer seen as an issue.

Many women recounted how they prized having the flexibility to attend primary school events, usually held during the school day, or to be involved in activities or reading in their children's classes. This was generally considered part of being an important presence in their children's primary school lives. They also referred to the tension created if an event clashed with something at work and they had to choose between work and their child's piano performance, and to a feeling of not being a 'good' mother when unable to attend, as with Cara. Again, once at secondary school, this requirement disappeared in terms of *day-time* attendance – apart from parents' evenings which could be in the afternoon, but these were infrequent and usually attended by both parents.

The stories of looking after primary school children tended to be characterised by juggling and organising. As Di (sons, 16 & 14, daughter, 11) noted, this period 'was probably in some respects the busiest from the point of view of juggling and getting everything done'. Time after school often included activities, socialising and having tea with friends. This usually required considerable effort on the mother's behalf, and was not always straightforward with constant changes and ad hoc arrangements. If the mother was not going to be there because of work, or had clashing activities or engagements, then she had to organise lifts, or for her husband to be around or ask favours of friends or neighbours. Several mothers had reservations about 'some' children doing too much after school and emphasised the need for down time. However, stories concurred that it was 'good' mothering if some afternoons they were doing things with their children, or enabling them

to do activities and/or see friends. Stories tended to echo Cara and Sam's representation of leaving children at after-school club or with a child-minder *every* day as not being 'good' mothering. As Gabby (son, 20, daughter, 17) explained 'I've never had to say to them, 'no you can't do that because I'm at work'. I think that children ought to be allowed to have a breadth of experiences, and that's what they've had'.

Once at secondary school, this *physical* intensity and effort on the mother's part noticeably reduces in the stories. Many children were still doing some activities – mainly sport or exercise, some music – but these both reduced down to activities the older children really wanted to pursue, and usually demanded less parental attendance, certainly at weekday training/sessions. Activities were usually at school after the school day, so did not always require transportation, or later in the evening or at the weekend, so did not impinge on work. For example, Gabby pointed out that dance classes or kickboxing might be at seven or later for older children, but more likely during working hours for younger children. Furthermore, children started to take on responsibility themselves for what they wanted to do and increasingly in organising this. By secondary school, stories indicate that children had taken over organising meeting up with friends, and the mother's requirement to act as go-between with friends' mothers was diminished. Di's youngest had just started at secondary school, and she talked of the switch from primary school where 'it was all more in my control', to her daughter arranging things with her new friends by text, and simply asking 'can I go to so-and-so's?'

In many stories, fitting in getting tea on the table (talked about as ideally healthy and therefore ideally home-cooked) at a reasonable time had also been one of the pressures with younger children. By secondary school, again this time-pressure had reduced - meal-times had moved back to early evening rather than late afternoon, and could flex if they needed to. Also, cooking the evening meal was where there was the highest level of sharing of domestic chores with a partner.

6.3.1.2 Growing need for emotional support: being there and letting go

According to the participants, simultaneous to this growing independence and diminishing need of their mothers physically, was an increasing need for their support emotionally. This was linked in the stories, as illustrated by both Cara and Sam, to both the emotional turbulence of adolescence and the complexity of the, often emotional, issues their children were grappling with.

The emotional ups and downs had been expected due to the prevalence of the discourse of 'hormonal' adolescents. Several respondents, like Cara, referred to younger adolescent

boys becoming 'monosyllabic' and 'grumpy' (for example, Judith in reference to her 15 year old son) or something similar to Cara's description of them 'disappearing under a hoody'. Adolescent girls were more likely to be described as 'moody' and very up and down emotionally (for example, Gabby referring to her 17 year old daughter). Differences were sometimes noted between siblings, however, with one being described as more 'teenagery' or 'difficult' than another (for example, Denise and Harriet contrasting their daughters). Some mothers referred to it not being as bad as they had expected or that they were, as Tanya (two daughters, 17 & 14) put it, still 'waiting for the awfulness'. Emotional outbursts and 'black' periods as, for example, Jessica (son 19, daughter 13) described a time when her then 14 year old son was really down on himself, were mostly seen as sporadic and/or a phase adolescents go through. Steph (daughters 16 & 11) commented that: 'my elder has not been immensely teenage-y really. We haven't had a horrible ride with her at all. She's been pretty gorgeous. As I say, hormonal and moody, but that's normal and to be expected'. Nonetheless, stories suggested this emotional vulnerability, or anticipation of it, required mothers to be highly sensitive to their children's moods. Whilst incidents could be worrying or hurtful, a key concern was losing the ability to communicate.

Carol's (sons 20 & 14) storytelling resonated with Cara and Sam and other participants in describing teenagers' issues as more complex and as such, could not be brushed off as easily as perhaps younger children sometimes were:

But as teenagers their issues are much more complex. It's about girlfriends and it's about friendships and it's about the pressures at parties and you can't do a kind of 'yes, yes, yes, that's great, (son)'. You can't do that. Well, you can but that would be totally useless wouldn't it really. 'Yes, yes, that must be really tough for you, okay, let me just..'. If they even dare to speak to you about those things, as a mum it's so nice in a way that I don't have that kind of pull to be needing to be – I can actually just kind of mentally do that and be there and just listen, because whatever you say is probably not very important but they just want to talk to you. But you're there for them.

Issues relating to relationships, friendships and peer groups were often cited. Mostly their concern was about their children's wellbeing and happiness. The requirement from them was to be there when their child was ready to talk, to be there mentally with the capacity to listen and signal their support, and sometimes to offer advice. It was also to pick up on these issues, if their child was not forthcoming.

The concerns raised could be more about their children taking risks or being at risk in some way, for example, through drinking or drugs, getting into trouble with fights or

muggings, or danger from strangers at night. Several mentioned experiences of particular incidents, like Cara, and tended to place importance on being able to communicate with their older children to ensure they got to the bottom of issues and their children learnt from them. Several others mentioned being worried about such incidents potentially happening, particularly as teenagers started going out more in the evenings. Or they referred to feeling 'lucky' that they had not had to deal with anything too challenging (for example, Paula, two daughters, 16 & 14).

Linked to this was managing negotiations with adolescents regarding when and within what boundaries they might be allowed to do something – for example go to a party where there would be alcohol. Denise (daughters 19, 15 & 13) described how her ability to insist on things dissipated with her older daughter, and how she really had to 'pick her battles'. Her older daughter was portrayed as 'strong-willed' and really pushed at the boundaries, wanting to go to clubs at 14, for example, whereas her next daughter has been very different and much easier. These sentiments were very much echoed by others. Communication was invariably cited as key in enabling mothers to 'steer' older children. Family meals were often cited as an important opportunity for discussion, as well as the time after school, for informal, everyday chats. There was a sense of imparting values through discussion, rather than laying down rules. When they talked about their children turning out well (so far), or the qualities they were proud of in their children, these were similar across the stories – for example, being kind and respectful, being able to talk with adults, having 'nice, sunny personalities' (as Sara, who had three daughters, put it), and being responsible.

Both Cara and Sam also identified still getting on well with their children and their children still wanting to spend time with them as illustrative of their 'success' with parenting, and this was reiterated by many women. Spending time included doing things at the weekend, like cycling or going to the pub, or going on holiday. Steph stressed that it meant a lot to her that she had 'a nearly 17 year old daughter who still talks to me, asks for advice, wants to discuss things', particularly bearing in mind that:

I would never have chosen to talk to my mother about anything, not from way younger...I wouldn't have gone shopping with my mother, I wouldn't have gone to the cinema with my mother, I wouldn't have done anything from choice with my mother, and that isn't the case with our daughters.

Supporting their children's education was invariably brought up. The majority saw this as being able to pick up on issues or being there for advice if required – support was usually more about encouragement than anything else, with most mothers very aware that at this

stage their children needed to be doing homework independently. For example, Denise (daughters 19, 15 & 13) explained that she felt her input was most useful in helping focus her daughters on what they might want to do and the choices they needed to make, mostly by asking the 'right sort of questions'.

Gabby (son 20, daughter 17) talked of the 'terrible balance between encouraging and nagging', and that 'one of the hardest things about older children is to know when to nag and when to stand back and let them make their own choices'. She linked her desire not to push her children too much academically with her own experience of being 'over-pressured'. Other mothers also referred to this, but referencing the highly competitive environment they felt their children were in these days, and being caught between wanting their children to do their best and not wanting to be 'pushy'.

Mirroring other stories, Teresa (daughters 16 & 14) suggested that her job was to provide a sense of security to enable her children to learn to be independent. However, there was an inherent 'struggle' between the 'almost feral protectiveness' and desire to 'solve everything and wrap them in cotton wool' and the 'responsibility to let them go' and 'given them enough freedom that they can experience things themselves and learn to cope'.

Being able to offer a sense of security was linked in mothers' rationalities to a close relationship with their children and sense of 'being there' whatever happens, as apparent in Cara and Sam's stories. Joanna (sons 13 & 11), having the youngest children in the study, still had the teenage years to come. She was worried about her elder son who struggled with social relationships and suffered from low confidence. Bearing in mind her job as a health visitor and her (2nd) Masters' studies in Infant Mental Health, she was concerned that she was in some way to blame, having struggled to breastfeed. In terms of what she felt was required by her now, as a mother, she focused on 'being there', particularly after school: 'I don't want them to think that work is more important than them'. Again, her own mother had been distant, and she indicated that this strengthened her resolve to be emotionally available for her own children. She suggested she was not too worried about adolescence, since her boys were able to talk to her about all sorts of things and 'that bodes well, I think'.

6.3.1.3 Perceived importance of a close relationship and communication

Usually participants told their mothering stories as 'success' stories. For almost half of them, this was from the perspective of having a child who had completed secondary school and was now at University or away from home travelling or working. As apparent in the preceding pages, this was not without 'admitting' to 'flaws' in their mothering, difficulties with certain aspects of parenting, incidences occurring and having worries

about their children. But stories of ‘good’ mothering of older children were focused on ‘being there’ to support their children emotionally through adolescence to independence. They placed a close relationship and the ability to communicate at the heart of this – rationalising that this was key to being able to provide emotional support and enable confidence and independence. Importantly, as I will come on to discuss in 6.3.2, they constructed sustained part-time work as *enabling* this.

It is worth noting that quite a lot of what has been discussed in relation to meeting older children’s needs could refer to either or both parents, not just the mother. As illustrated in the last chapter, the language used by participants switched between ‘I’ and ‘we’ (including the father), and this appeared to be more so at this stage of mothering/parenting. Many fathers were indeed involved in negotiations, agreeing boundaries, imparting values through mealtime discussions and encouraging homework. Most were described as being very ‘involved’ in parenting and having ‘close’ relationships with their children. Sometimes there was a gendered family dynamic with perceived closer relationships between father and son(s), and mother and daughter(s). Steph (daughters, 16 & 11) and her husband were the only couple to have shared parenting consistently from the start. Interestingly, she indicated that there might be a gendered distinction relating to making oneself available, and that men may not be ‘tuned in’ in the same way. Several others referred to similar distinctions (for example, Denise, daughters 19, 15 & 13) or to women being better at talking about emotional things (for example, Paula, daughters 16 & 14). For the most part, however, their stories referenced the part they played in ‘good’ parenting as sustained part-time workers, rather than as women per se. This will be picked up on further in the next section.

6.3.2 Sustained part-time working constructed as *enabling* ‘good’ mothering of older children

This section will investigate further the similarities found in Cara and Sam’s stories where sustained part-time working was constructed as *enabling* ‘good’ mothering of older children. This will cover how sustained part-time working was linked in their storytelling to ‘good’ mothering through the importance of time invested in the past (working part-time when their children were younger), the importance of time after school (through shorter days), having the mental capacity to provide emotional support (through not being over-loaded), and protecting family time and availability (through a day at home). I will then turn to investigating moral ‘othering’ through justifications for not resuming full-time work and being better placed than stay-at-home mothers.

6.3.2.1 Perceived importance of time invested in the past

Mothers tended to indicate that a close relationship and ability to communicate with their older children required that they had invested time in the relationship in the past – had engaged with them, and as Sara (daughters, 18, 16, 12) put it, been a ‘presence’ in their lives, ‘...and I think I’ve also been able to put in time with my kids and I think they’ve turned out – touch wood – well-rounded individuals’.

Karen (daughters 16 & 12, son 14) explained how she had remained very close to her children through spending a considerable amount of time over the years doing sports with them and taking them to sports training and competitions, linking this time with being able to ‘share your experiences’ and ‘express your views and values’. She questioned whether maybe they had just been ‘lucky’ and their kids ‘might hurtle off the rails at some point’. But she countered this with not seeing it happening because she felt she had invested time in the relationships and thus had a ‘connection’ with her children. She stressed that it was the amount and nature of the time she had spent with her children that had ‘enabled’ lots of chatting and subsequently, a closeness – rather than because she was an ‘emotional’ type of mother (which she argued she was not).

6.3.2.2 Representation of time after school as important

Cara and Sam’s stories made a specific case for having some time after school at home with their children. This, they argued, was ‘normal’, every-day, unrushed time - time for chatting and having cups of tea, picking up on things that had happened at school, making oneself available. Protecting this time was constructed as a core part of why they would not resume work full-time. This was repeated across all the stories. For example, in a similar vein, Jessica (school finance officer, son 19, daughter 13) specifically mentioned time after school as an opportunity to talk with her daughter:

There are times when they, especially girls as they start going through puberty and they have periods and stuff like that, there are days when they want to come home and flop on the sofa with you, or talk about the friends, because with girls the friendships are so dramatic. And they want to talk about it. And I think the trouble is that if you work full-time you don’t get that opportunity, you don’t get the window.

Delia (dentist, daughter 14, son 12) suggested that her husband felt he missed out because by the time he got home all the children really wanted to do was watch TV or go on the PlayStation. She had noticed that when she gets back later, they do not really want a conversation by then:

I've learnt to expect that now. I just know that I'm not going to get a lot out of them on a Thursday, whereas the other days at any time between four and six, dependent on whether they've got activities, you get that kind of chatting. That's really important.

Patterns of part-time working varied across participants. Similar to both Cara and Sam, many women had changed jobs, hours and ways of working over the course of mothering. Fourteen participants had upped their hours in recent years, as constraints on their time were released. However, in keeping with their rationale of *still* needing to 'be there' and the importance placed on time after school, all mothers were at home at least two afternoons post four o'clock, with most arranging their work to be there all or nearly all of the 'after school' time.

Five mothers had, like Sam, put in place working hours and modes of working that meant they were always or almost always there after school. Three of these had moved to work in schools whilst they had primary school aged children: Jessica (school finance officer), Paula (school admin), and Carol (school careers advisor). Di (tax consultant) and Gabby (professional support lawyer) worked four shorter days. These mothers were not necessarily always there when their children got home – Jessica, for example had a long commute – but if not, they said they were there not long after.

Six further mothers were mostly at home, after school. Susannah (multi-media consultant), Steph (digital consultant & coach), Harriet (market researcher) and Karen (sales/marketing consultant) were self-employed and worked from home. Sometimes their work meant they were out during the afternoon, and sometimes they would be at home but needed to carry on working, but mostly they tried to organise their work to be there when their children got home from school. Delia (dentist) worked two shorter days and only one longer day, whilst Joanna (health visitor) worked five shorter days and spent some time studying at home for her Masters' degree. Dawn (structural engineers' practice manager) and Tanya (clinical nurse specialist) were, like Cara, at home after school two afternoons per week. Teresa (HR director) was at home one afternoon and working from home two further afternoons.

The final four participants had all experienced significant changes to their working life recently. Three had scaled down in some way (Janey, vet, Sara, TV producer and Judith, occupational therapist), although they all linked their decision to make changes at this stage to a growing disillusionment with their compromised careers or part-time positions at work (see 8.2), rather than issues with work constraining their mothering. One participant, Charlotte (marketing manager, sons 18 & 16) had been persuaded between our interview sessions to scale up to full-time, coinciding with her eldest leaving for

University and her youngest entering the 6th Form. She had been around at least two afternoons per week until the boys were seventeen and fifteen, when she moved to 4.5 days per week. She explained that opportunities at work had coincided with her feeling it was 'alright' for her to be there less. She suggested that her elder son, who had experienced bullying, difficulties in mixing socially and dyslexia during his adolescence, would not have coped if she had not been around. She explained that her husband was 'better' with her younger son than she was and was around if needed since he now worked from home.

There was no suggestion of using any formal childcare for secondary school aged children after school, even whilst a younger sibling was going to a child-minder or going to after-school club. A number of mothers reported that children stopped going to after-school club before the end of primary school, having grown out of it. Mothers were generally reluctant to leave a primary school child with an older secondary school sibling on a regular basis, although this could be acceptable from time to time. In a few cases, there were concerns about leaving younger secondary school siblings together for long if they were liable to fight.

In investigating the extent to which participants were placing importance on it being them, as the mother, who needed to 'be there' after school, it is interesting to consider their partners' work patterns and whether their presence or absence after school might have impacted on mothers in terms of either releasing or constraining them.

Of those participants who were at home less after school, Denise (practice manager, structural engineers) had a partner who currently worked from home, and Teresa's (HR director) partner was able to flex to work at home some of the time – both women had upped their hours in the last couple of years. We have seen that Charlotte (marketing manager), who was scaling up to full-time, had a partner working from home, and similarly Karen (sales/marketing consultant) was just starting to work on a networking project that would take her out of the home more and her partner was now working part-time from home. These four cases indicate that having a partner at home may have provided reassurance that when they were not there their partner (sometimes) was, even if he was working. Nonetheless, all four still emphasised the importance of being at home *some* of the time, or in Charlotte's case, her having been there up until the very last stage.

It is also worth noting that both Janey (vet & music teacher) and Sara (TV producer) who had recently scaled back their work, had partners working long hours in particularly demanding, high level jobs that involved considerable amounts of international travel. Several further participants had partners working long hours away from the home. Cara's

partner had done a lot of dropping and picking up early on, but his career had since taken off and he was now working 60+ hours. Gabby (professional support lawyer) described herself as more or less a single mother during the week as her partner now worked away Monday to Friday. Harriet's (market researcher) partner also worked long hours and went straight out to go climbing several days per week after work. For these five mothers, if they were not there after school because of work, no one would be there.

From a practical point of view, however, almost all the rest of the participants were in a similar position with regards to the time after school, in that their partners were not there either. However, those with partners working more standard hours did potentially have more support with regards to meals and any ferrying that needed doing in the late afternoon/evening.

6.3.2.3 Linking school-day time to protecting family time and availability

Twelve of the twenty participants had at least one whole day at home during the week as part of their part-time working arrangements. This was obviously mostly time when their children were at school. A small minority talked about keeping this day at home in order to 'make sure the house is in order' (Tanya, clinical nurse specialist, daughters 17 & 14), 'keep on top of things' (Delia, dentist, daughter 14, son 12) and 'clear things for the weekend' (Denise, practice manager, daughters, 19, 15 & 13). They specifically linked getting chores done during school time with freeing up family time. Others were using some of this time to do chores and household organisation, but this was more by 'default', as Jessica (school finance officer, son 19, daughter 13) put it, feeling they ought to do some, because they had more 'time off'. Nonetheless, even if by default, it was often thought that this freed up family time and contributed to a smoother running of the household.

Women often talked of this school-day time as giving them unhurried 'space' for themselves. This notion of reclaiming time for themselves and allowing themselves a bit of 'space' was in contrast to stories relating to pre-school and primary school phases where time was invariably filled with juggling work and children. In many cases, what they were actually doing with this time did not relate directly to their mothering. However, 'space' for themselves was associated with not being overloaded - and as illustrated earlier in this chapter, a sense of not being overloaded was linked to having the mental capacity required to pick up on their children's issues and to make themselves available, without forcing or rushing. There was also a sense that this 'space' for other things was good for their wellbeing (discussed in more detail in 6.4).

6.3.2.4 Justifications for staying part-time (not resuming full-time work)

Moral 'othering' was not a dominant theme in the stories. It was, however, sometimes evident in the logic of rationalising sustaining part-time employment, or sometimes inferred. It is important to bear in mind that in their justification, the mothers in this study were primarily positioning themselves in relation to 'other' middle-class, university-educated, partnered mothers. In making sense of their relative lack of career 'success' compared to where they could have been, they were predominantly rationalising why they were still part-time and had not returned to a full-time 'career'.

This chapter has described the women's perception of a growing need for emotional support for their adolescent children and how they constructed their sustained part-time working as *enabling* 'good' mothering. The stories largely focused on the perceived benefits of staying part-time. The corollary, however, were the risks of not staying part-time and not 'being there' in the same ways – for example, potentially missing issues, losing the connection they had with their children, or their children not turning to them. These were mentioned from time to time as part of their justification for staying part-time. For example, in the previous section on time after school, Jessica suggested that 'if you work full-time you don't get that opportunity, you don't get the window' and Delia referred to not getting 'that kind of chatting' when she worked later and was not at home between 4 and 6.

Gabby (son 20, daughter 17) talked of a friend returning to full-time employment and connected this to her having 'no idea' what her daughter (a friend of Gabby's daughter) was up to. She had recently been put in the uncomfortable position of realising that her friend's daughter, unbeknownst to her friend, had lied about not being in town one night:

She was part-time when (her other daughter) was the same age, and she described her as a party animal and I think (daughter in question) is equally as much a rebel...she's gone back to full-time work since (her daughter) was doing her GCSE's and I don't think she has got any idea what her daughter is up to.

There was, however, often an acknowledgement that staying part-time was not just about their children's needs, it was also about benefits to them, as mothers. Steph (2 daughters, 16 & 11) illustrated this through a reference to her sister, who had always worked full-time and her kids are 'gorgeous':

So it isn't the whole story. So maybe it's much more about me and what it's enabled me to do. So, it's a bit more selfish, but still with them as the focus...I think if I'd carried on working full-time, I mean I didn't even contemplate it, but had I done that, I don't

know what space I would have had for them. And I wanted to have space for them. I wanted to have children, I wanted to be a mother and I wanted to experience what that meant as fully as possible, whilst not doing *just* that.

Here, Steph referred to worrying about not having the 'space' for her children if she worked full-time, but also that there was perhaps something more 'selfish' about her staying part-time – that she wanted to experience being a mother 'as fully as possible'. This is made more poignant when bearing in mind her earlier recounting of the difficult relationship with her own mother, which had made her very wary about having children in the first place. Her reference to 'whilst not doing *just* that' is a good example of the simultaneous acceptance of the discourse that devalues mothering as somewhat unstimulating alongside adhering to the importance of and fulfilment gained from 'being there'. It also illustrates the apparent lack of a need to justify working (rather than being at home all the time).

There was another strand of moral 'othering' of full-time working mothers apparent occasionally in the stories. This related to the notion of 'priorities' and in particular, hinting that full-time working mothers might be prioritising money and status over children. Again, overt references linking full-time working mothers to chasing money and status were only occasional, and generally speaking the emphasis was on justifying staying part-time. However, the way in which this was justified could contain such an inference. For example, Gabby (professional support lawyer, son 20, daughter 17), made the following comments about her decision to stay part-time once her youngest was at secondary school:

I'd watched people make different decisions about bringing up their children and I don't think there is a right or a wrong decision for anybody, but I think the rewards come with the children saying things like 'I don't mind if we don't go to a villa in Spain, it doesn't matter if we take the tent, because I know I can have friends after school'. So we did get to that stage. I had this dodgy patch when I was trying to do everything. But, I've been able to be there for them, and I think that is more important for them, definitely for them, and for me, than having expensive holidays or a big house or whatever.

Where these odd comments were made, the mothers tended to acknowledge that they were speaking from a perspective of relative privilege. Nonetheless, for a number of mothers the impact on the family's earnings of them working part-time long-term was considerable – for Gabby, for example, where she was the main breadwinner, and for Steph, where both she and her husband had worked part-time. Steph suggested that the

compromises they had had to make in terms of earnings and status were far more 'palatable' than the compromises to parenting associated with prioritising career ladders and increasing earnings: 'obviously there are little moments when I think, oh it would be nice to be able to do that, but it's not that, it's more that I want to feel good about what we've done, raising the girls in this way'.

As with Cara and Sam, there was a tendency to morally 'other' full-time working mothers in the final reflections on their stories – in the summing up of their justification for staying part-time. None of the mothers in this study were planning returning to full-time work while their children were still at home – although as noted earlier (6.3.2.2), Charlotte (marketing manager, sons 18 & 16) did in fact do so when the opportunity arose between our two storytelling sessions.

6.3.2.5 Positioning themselves as better placed than stay-at-home mothers

The participants in this study did not position themselves as being disadvantaged in their mothering vis-à-vis stay-at-home mothers. It is striking that there was a distinct lack of justification for being in employed work rather than being at home full-time. As noted in 6.3.2.2, all the mothers were around at least two afternoons after school and the majority were always or almost always around after school. With the shift in what was perceived as 'good' mothering of adolescents, I have outlined how it was that these mothers constructed sustained part-time working as *enabling* 'good' mothering. There was little sign of any tension relating to not 'being there' enough. Indeed, they emphasised being well placed to both 'be there' and simultaneously 'let go'. As I will now come on to illustrate, there were indications that 'being there' *all* the time, at this stage of mothering teenagers, was no longer the 'ideal' position. This was firstly related to perceptions of stay-at-home mothers being over-controlling and not giving children the space to be independent, and secondly to 'pushiness' and over-competitiveness about their children's accomplishments. This was in contrast to positioning of full-time mothering up until secondary school, which was not questioned in terms of its delivery of 'good' mothering. Again, it is important to note that their reference was middle-class, university educated stay-at-home mothers.

Harriet (market researcher, daughters 15 & 12) described the mothers of some of her younger daughter's friends who are not in employed work: 'and what I observe is that they micro manage their children and they are just there all the time'. Tanya (clinical nurse specialist, daughters 17 & 14) discussed the impact of 'the work life balance thing' on a mother's ability and approach to discipline. Having referred to the fact that 'I discipline in a more measured, fair way when I am not overly tired and stressed – and the

main stressor there would be work', she then pointed out that 'this cuts both ways'. She suggested that some of her best friends who did not work overdid the talking through, 'infinite patience thing' – she disagreed with this, arguing for 'trying to instil in your children some self-efficacy'.

Gabby (professional support lawyer, son 20, daughter 17) talked of two friends she had known since first having children who did not work and she described as not just 'obsessive', but also 'highly competitive' about their children and their achievements. Similarly, Steph (digital consultant & life coach, daughters 16 & 11) referred to this notion of transferral of expectation from themselves to their children:

I've encountered a breed of women here that, to me I call them professional mothers, because what they're professional about is being mothers. So they've had careers, they've stopped their careers, they had huge expectations and all their ambition and expectation is directed into the children. They are hugely competitive about their children's successes, compared with your children. Just not a world that I wish to partake of at all.

Linked to this was the idea that lack of personal fulfilment could have a negative impact over time on mothering. Steph went on to talk again about her mother, who did not work, and the difficult relationship she had with her as a teenager:

I did not want my mum's life, I really, really didn't. I didn't think it had done her any good as a person. What I mean by that is that I don't think it had made her happy. I didn't want to bear the brunt of parenting in the way that she had. Didn't want that sort of relationship with my children, where I was the, do this, do that, niggle, niggle, nag, nag.

Two participants mentioned having recently considered giving up employed work to be at home. One of these was Delia (dentist, daughter 14, son 12), although she admitted this followed a spell of holiday, and that once she got back to work it was fine. The other was Susannah (multi-media consultant, sons 13 & 11) whose story suggested she had become disillusioned with her career, but felt trapped (her contribution to the family income was significant). She had continued to feel that her working constrained her mothering or certainly her enjoyment of it. Although her self-employment meant she could be around after school most days, she then had to return to work in the evenings, once her husband was back. She described how torn she felt during the holidays when she had to work, but could see her boys and husband (who was a teacher) enjoying themselves in the garden.

6.4 Sustained part-time working and a mother's wellbeing

This final section turns to the resonance across the stories in positioning sustained part-time working as benefitting their own wellbeing as mothers, as well as enabling them to meet their older children's needs. This has been touched on, but is worth drawing together and re-stating at this point. The stories were not told as stories of 'sacrifice', driven purely by a requirement to put their children's needs first. Rather, the participants often referred to their enjoyment of being a mother at this stage and spending time with their teenage children. Stories tended to stress not wanting to 'miss out', heightened when time was limited as children became more independent and were starting to leave home. Not wanting to 'mess up' was also linked to their own wellbeing as well as their children's. This was apparent in the way in which the women described the fulfilment derived from things having 'turned out well' (Cara). Positive outcomes were often referenced in the storytelling as having a close relationship and children still wanting to spend time with them. These contained benefits for them personally, both in terms of making the most of the time left with children at home, but also in laying the foundations for a future relationship as a mother of adult children.

In Chapter 5, Cara made it clear that the teenage years had not all been plain sailing, but that she had and was still appreciating this phase enormously. For example, she explained her feeling that looking back things had 'turned out well' by referring to 'getting on well' with her sons, 'laughing together', them being 'affectionate and funny' and them all 'enjoying time together'. Time spent 'chilling' after school was singled out as enjoyable. This upbeat storytelling was in contrast to her use of a narrative of *struggle* in her early mothering and the depiction of her mothering crises and 'vanished decade'. The concluding sense of 'success' and fulfilment as a mother also contrasted with her opening reference to not having been interested at all in children in her twenties.

Several mothers talked of enjoying each subsequent stage more than the previous one (for example Delia and Harriet), citing aspects of their 'more adult' (as Sam put it) relationship and interaction as more 'fun', 'engaging' and 'interesting'. They talked of their pleasure at 'being in touch with their day-to-day lives' (Delia), indicating that the chats after school were not just important for picking up on issues, but times they looked forward to. As Steph said, that was when they had their 'best conversations'. Being able to 'talk about anything' (Judith), 'get on well' (Gabby) and spend unhurried time with their children were prized and linked to an appreciation of how their children were turning out – their characters (Denise), personalities (Sara), qualities (Carol), views on the world (Jessica), how they were 'taking their place in the world' (Steph). Tanya talked of how 'fantastic' it had been, seeing her daughters 'developing' and 'interacting', despite this being 'bittersweet' as their 'days are

numbered'. It appeared that a sense of enjoyment and fulfilment from their mothering could be heightened if they had not been close to their own mother (for example Steph and Cara) or if they had positioned themselves earlier in their stories as not being particularly maternal (for example Judith and Teresa).

Perceived potential risks of not 'being there' for teenage children (see 6.3.2.4) were inherent in the rationale for not resuming full-time work. However, participants also stressed that full-time working mothers were missing out. Indeed several referred to their husbands missing out (for example, Judith, Delia and Jessica). It is pertinent to remind the reader of the three fathers (the husbands of Charlotte, Carol and Karen) who had stepped back in their careers in order to spend more time with their teenage children. All three were described as feeling they had missed out on the early years and wanted to make up for that. The storytelling indicated that this was out of choice, rather than a sense of obligation, and instigated by a desire to develop a closer bond and enjoy time with their children.

6.5 Conclusion

Overall, the mothering stories were almost always told as 'success' stories, for some 'so far', so more tentatively, for others from a position of 'completeness' (as Cara put it) of this stage of mothering where they had at least one child who was no longer at home full-time. There was a strong sense of needing to 'be there' for their children at the heart of their storytelling. The nature of this need shifted and changed, and along with this, so did the perceived impact of part-time working.

For most, the fact that they were *still* working part-time was not what they had anticipated, either in terms of mothering or career; hence this seemed to require some 'justification'. The orientation of this 'justification' was predominantly towards full-time working – why they were still working part-time and had not resumed full-time, indicating this was the perceived expectation. There was hardly any suggestion that staying at home had been considered. Stories indicated an assumption that they would continue working.

Only four mothers (Sam, Karen, Di and Delia) were found to have fully engaged with a narrative of *prioritisation* in their early mothering stories, where they positioned themselves as 'naturally' maternal and linking this with always having been less ambitious. Within this narrative, prioritising 'being there' for their children was constructed as anticipated and morally the right thing to do, and the meaning of work was *reframed* as a secondary, albeit still an important part of their identity. More commonly used was a narrative of *struggle* in the early mothering stories, whereby the storytelling was designed to highlight tensions between mothering and working, attempting to make

sense of compromises to jobs, and subsequent readjustments and complicity in ending up in positions that fitted with caring for children, but often removed them from 'career' ladders. Analysis indicated that tensions were *neutralised*. Tensions to achieving mothering expectations could be reduced, but this was often accompanied by a rationale indicating compromising their job was their 'only' option and a sense of dilution and/or transference of dissatisfaction to their working situations. This was the dominant narrative in a third of the stories, with just under half the participants using a combination of *prioritisation* and *struggle*. The nature of the participant's work, role and organisational culture were found to make a difference in terms of difficulty in working flexibly and/or reduced hours, both practically and socio-ideologically. Being able to find childcare that fitted with their work and having good networks of support were factors that appeared to make it easier to manage part-time working and caring for children. Overall, the narrative of *struggle* indicated that the focus of ideological work during early mothering was on trying to be a 'good' mother by 'being there', but whilst maintaining work. 'Career' identity appeared to be 'on hold'. The primary school stage was characterised in the stories by a sense of juggling and readjustment.

The resonance in the stories of mothering adolescents was striking. A continuing need to 'be there' was cited as unanticipated, although at the heart of their rationale for staying part-time. Many had assumed not being needed after school and probably returning to full-time work once the children were 'older'. Stories positioned them as *better* placed for 'good' mothering of adolescents than full-time working or stay-at-home mothers. Part-time working was represented as no longer constraining mothering or creating tension, but rather *enabling* 'good' mothering of teenagers. Core to this was a shift from physical to emotional support, and needing to 'be there' being in tension with needing to 'let go'. 'Good' mothering was therefore linked to the perceived importance of a close relationship and ability to communicate, so that teenage children were able to turn to them if they needed help, and they could pick up issues troubling their children. Time invested in the past and time after school were, for example, represented as important aspects of sustained part-time working *enabling* 'good' mothering. Moral 'othering' whilst not a dominant theme, was found to be evident or implied in justifications for remaining part-time.

The final section explored the ways in which sustained part-time working was positioned in the stories as benefitting a mother's wellbeing too. The women stressed the enjoyment they derived from spending time with their teenage children. They emphasised the importance of not 'missing out' or 'messaging up'. Time with their children was limited and precious, with their growing independence and an empty nest looming. This also related

to the stated desire to secure the foundations of a close relationship for the future, so that their adult children would still want to spend time with them. The stories of mothering were not told as stories of 'sacrifice'. The women did suggest that their careers had suffered, but they invariably stressed that the rewards from 'being there' for their children had outweighed the career losses.

Chapter 7

Two stories of sustained part-time working (as a mother)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises the stories of Joanna and Sara, relating to their working lives. As with Cara and Sam's mothering stories (Ch.5), these have been chosen to provide distinctive reference points, rather than representing 'typical' stories of sustained part-time working. Sara's story of part-time working in TV production will illustrate greater tension associated with her experiences and making sense of where she had ended up, compared to Joanna's story of working part-time as a health visitor. Sara's story, despite a continued career progression, was full of contradictions regarding what she had or had not achieved and how she felt about this. Joanna's will be shown to be more consistent in making sense of the path she had taken, where she had remained in the same role since having children. Telling these stories in depth will expose the complex matrix of inter-related tensions linked to the experience of sustained part-time working and the impact on their 'career' and 'work' identities.

In the previous chapter, in exploring the tension between mothering and working, attention was drawn to the compromises and adjustments made in order to fit work around caring for children. These were again apparent in these two stories, as was the continued resistance to resuming a full-time career focus, justified by an unanticipated need to 'be there' for their teenage children. It will be argued that a narrative of *resumption* is one of three key narratives found across the stories of sustained part-time working. Resistance to resumption was core to the *work* of the stories. These two stories, building on Cara and Sam's (Ch.5), will illustrate a shift in the focus of tension over time from achieving mothering expectations (as a part-time worker) to making sense of the consequences of sustained part-time working on 'career' and 'work' identities (as a mother of older children). It will become clear that a narrative of *resumption* framed the stories of sustained part-time working, setting up the expectations against which the stories were told and justified.

Through stories told through contrasting professional and organisational cultures, and subsequently very different experiences of part-time working, Joanna and Sara's stories will illustrate how their sense of 'success' and 'fulfilment' was constructed *relative* to expectations – and that these expectations differed and shifted according to their individual circumstances and contexts. They included expectations relating to notions of 'career' as progression, and 'part-timers' as lacking in commitment compared to 'ideal' workers. Interlinked was the sense making regarding their 'contribution' to providing for

their families, within the context of gendered relationships of care and provision with their husbands. Again, the two stories will illustrate different experiences in this respect.

The level of tension also related to the extent of opportunities for *reorientation* – finding alternative ways of *reframing* fulfilment from work and the meaning of work within life. This is the second narrative I will draw out, with Joanna's story providing some good examples of this. Sara's story will also provide an illustration of a third narrative, that of *disorientation*, where a note of panic and fatalism had crept into the sense making.

7.2 Joanna's story of sustained part-time working

Joanna is a Health Visitor, married to a Social Worker. She has two boys aged 13 and 11. Her first unprompted story began with how she 'ended up' in nursing and subsequently made her way, via midwifery, to health visiting:

I was never very good at maths and in those days, because I am 50, you couldn't go to university unless you had maths O' Level. And I was a bit of, I suppose I didn't want to go to a Polytechnic. Isn't that stupid? So I ended up in nursing which wasn't something that I'd intended. It wasn't a burning ambition. But when you sort of add up the options if you're not going to go to university and you want some sort of a professional career that seemed like a good idea.

In this way, she positioned a 'professional career' as her aim and nursing as a means of achieving this, when university had not been an option, but made it clear that nursing itself was not her 'burning ambition'. In the final year of her training, aged twenty-one, she met her husband and they moved to London. What she *was* interested in, was women's health, and so a few years' later, she trained in midwifery. Whilst she loved the 'nurturing' side of being a midwife, she found working on a labour ward really stressful and 'not me at all'. She went back into gynaecology as a Ward Sister, but found this stressful in a different way. So, she turned to health visiting: 'I really loved it. I found my niche'. She explained that this enabled her to retain the nurturing side to her work, but she had more autonomy and her job was more containable: 'yes, so I've been a health visitor for about nineteen, twenty years'.

7.2.1 Both going part-time – and then following 'different paths'

Having set the scene with the twists and turns in her journey to find 'her niche' in a 'professional career', Joanna turned to her story of becoming a mother and initially going part-time. She and her partner decided to have children when her 'biological clock was getting to the end, was ticking away'. She was thirty-seven when she had her first child, by

which time they had a house and mortgage. Joanna recounted how they decided they would both work part-time:

...because my husband sort of felt that it was as much his right to be at home with children as mine. You know, he sort of felt very strongly about that. And being a bit of a feminist I sort of thought yes, dead right, you know. So we had this shared sort of responsibility.

She referred to how 'incredibly lucky' they were to be 'in the kind of jobs that allowed that to happen'. She was aware that 'if we'd been in different kinds of jobs with less flexibility, less family friendly policies, it would have been very, very difficult I think'. She mentioned at this point that on returning to work, she felt 'quite resentful about that, when it came to it'. She did not expand on this initially, but proceeded with explaining how they alternated working three days one week, then two days the next, sharing the child-care fifty-fifty: 'We did that for years really. So it worked really well'. Their second son was born a couple of years later, and she returned to work after three months' maternity leave. But this time she suggested:

I didn't feel any resentment about going back because I think what I realised on reflection was that I couldn't be a full-time mother really. It wouldn't have been very good for my mental health I think. I think working is really part of who I am and part of my identity. And I think that would have been really quite difficult to give up in retrospect. So I felt we'd found a good life-work balance.

She reflected on how hard she had found mothering, despite (or possibly because of) her work as a health visitor, midwife and nurse, but then 'I got back to work and that definitely did the trick. I find that really sort of suits me'.

When the children were four and two, they decided to leave London. Joanna had a job, but her husband took three months to find one - 'since then, his career has taken off'. They continued to both work part-time, sharing childcare fifty-fifty until the children were eight and six. Again, Joanna stressed how 'lucky' they were to be in such flexible jobs. Once her husband returned full-time, she continued part-time, working twenty-five hours across five days – so she was always able to drop off, pick up and be there after school. Her first unprompted storytelling ended as follows:

(Husband's) career has really taken off. He does a lot of travelling. And sometimes he is away overnight. And that works because I am not as career-minded as he is really. I am quite happy; I've got a job, an interesting job. And that sustains me. And I really

enjoy my job. So there isn't a tug in that way, whereas I think if we were both very career-minded and both wanting to go away overnight, you know, have deadlines, it would be quite hard actually... So now I think we've gone on different paths really. (Husband) is very dedicated to what he does. And for me it's a job really, more than a career - at the moment anyway. And that suits me.

The fact that her husband's career had 'really taken off' since going back full-time was repeated a number of times during Joanna's storytelling. Here, the *work* of her story was to position herself as 'not as career minded' and as sustained by her job, which she enjoyed – thus justifying why not resuming a 'dedicated' career focus like her husband had not been an issue for her.

I asked Joanna to go back and expand on her story of mothering through the phases. Her words again emphasised her struggle to achieve the very high standards she had set for herself with regards to mothering expectations, but at the same time, 'there wasn't a struggle around childcare and stuff' over the early years since this had worked so well sharing it with her husband. At this point, she noted: 'I wasn't really sure I wanted to have children really', and when they did decide to, being in her late thirties, it was a 'now or never kind of scenario'. She explained that up until then she had spent considerable time studying – after working for a while she had done a degree in Health Studies, and a Masters, as well as studying midwifery, health visiting, and gynaecology. She described this as 'my recreation really'. She stressed her intrinsic interest in studying, allowing her to develop her understanding about people. She did a course at the Women's Therapy Centre, and another on working with women using a psychodynamic approach – 'So I think I was a bit of a feminist really'. Joanna then revealed her very difficult relationship with her father and that he had made her childhood hard because he had been 'a very angry sort of man'. She followed this with 'so I suppose I didn't really want to have children – I don't know why'. It was her husband who had been very keen.

A narrative thread runs through this account, relating to justifying not having resumed a full-time career focus and, linked to this, not having progressed – in the way that her husband had, and in a way that her story suggested was expected in a 'professional career'. Her storytelling was working at distinguishing between being 'career-minded' and gaining sustenance from work she found enjoyable and rewarding. In bringing up at this juncture that she had not really wanted children and that her 'recreation' before children had been studying, she was suggesting that her 'not being career-minded' was not driven by an overriding desire to be a mother (as for example, we saw in Sam's story). But nor did 'not being career-minded' preclude a strong and sustaining identification with her work as a

health visitor. She stressed that rather by 'luck' than planning, she had not experienced the same 'constraints', 'sacrifices' and 'compromises' that she encountered with mothers she meets as a health visitor. This followed her having built up a picture of her working life wherein: practically, working part-time and managing childcare had not been a struggle, due to the flexibility of her job and strong support from her husband early on; and ideologically, it had worked, due to 'not being career-minded' and the fact that she was sustained by the work itself.

Joanna resumed her mothering story, some aspects of which were noted in Chapter 6. Pertinent here was the particular emphasis on feeling the continuing need to 'be there' after school, now that her sons were at secondary school. She did not want her children to be 'latchkey' kids like she had been and she was keen to retain the communicative relationship she felt she had invested in – again, in contrast to the emotionally 'distant' relationship she had with her own mother. She was now contracted to work thirty hours, which she worked across five days, making sure she was home by four, unless her husband was working from home, in which case she would be home by five-thirty.

7.2.2 Part-time working and contributing 'differently' but 'equally'

In discussing how she and her husband shared parenting, now that he worked full-time and she was still working part-time, she first recounted how her husband, being more patient, tended to help with homework and she had opted out. She got up at six-thirty and did chores before work. Since her work required 'lots of emotional labour', she tended to be tired by the evening, so she did mornings and after school and her husband did evenings. He did lots of the cooking because 'I'm not that interested – he's really good at it'. He was good at technology so he sorted out or helped the boys with anything technical, and did DIY and gardening. On the other hand 'he doesn't know how to switch the washing machine on. He never does the ironing. He doesn't clean the house'. Also:

Those sorts of logistical, motherly sorts of things, domestic things, I do, and (husband) does less of now. I think that's what most women do; they work, but have in their heads a mental sort of overview of the domestic needs of the family, which can be a bit, I suppose, stressful. I don't think it really enters (husband's) mind, because he doesn't have to think about those kinds of things. Like when it's birthdays and Christmas, it's all me... But that's ok. That's ok. He's into food, so he does the food shopping every week and stuff. I mean it is quite, you know, I don't feel hard done by. I feel like things are shared out. And he does what he's good at and I do what I am good at. And that's fine. There isn't a tussle about that really.

The work of this storytelling was to illustrate that whilst she and her husband had divided what they did, it was 'shared out' and they each did what they were 'good at'. This suggestion of a fair allocation was in slight tension with her referencing that he did less now of the 'logistical, motherly sort of things', and that she had overall responsibility for domestic needs which was 'a bit stressful' alongside working.

Joanna came on to expand on her views on gender distinctions and similarities. She argued strongly that 'men can be just as good at being the primary parent as women can' and 'men seemed much more interested in fathering these days'. However:

I think women are socialised into paying more attention to all the domestic stuff... It's very, very difficult to stop that happening. And I think (husband) and I have fallen into that as time has gone by. I think before children it was all pretty equal.

They had also divided tasks back then (him – cooking, her – cleaning), but it had been a 'fairly equal division of labour in terms of time'. Having hinted that division of labour had become less equal, she proposed that it *had* continued to be 'pretty equal', that by nine o'clock she disappeared upstairs and it was 'his time, his turn'. Then he would be replying to work emails at 1am.

These slight contradictions about whether or not they were sharing 'equally' illustrate the complexity of evaluating 'equality' when different tasks are divided, rather than each task shared – particularly with different gendered meanings attached to them. They also highlight the importance of appreciating the context of the evaluation. For example, when talking about division of labour in terms of time, this shifted dependent on whether this was relating to *all* work (where contribution could be seen as 'equal' overall) or just unpaid domestic work (she did a bit more than him). Joanna considered her own situation as 'pretty equal', relative to many couples she came across through her work.

Joanna talked of observing through her work as a health visitor that the expectation of equality in partnerships was perhaps even higher now:

I think there is the sort of equality of opportunity in many areas of work. Therefore I think women do expect that it will be an equal partnership. I've seen lots of people struggle when that doesn't happen. A lot of very disappointed women who've had babies and can't quite believe that they've been landed with all this responsibility.... And I can see how relationships break down after having children because it's not always something that's explicitly discussed before you have them. There is just an

expectation that you will carry on sharing the domestic role because that's the way you've done things. Then suddenly, god the rules have changed.

I asked Joanna whether her feelings about feminism had changed over the years. This prompted her to return to the 'resentment' she had mentioned on returning to work after her first child. 'I didn't have any *choice*' she explained. She *had* to go back to work, although initially she did not feel ready. So she felt a bit resentful towards her husband for 'being quite adamant that he had as much right to work part-time', and 'surprisingly' resentful of women with partners earning loads of money so they could choose not to go back straightaway. She knew, however, that her husband was 'right' and she 'wouldn't have been happy with that kind of man really'. Her childhood experience had instilled in her that 'to give up your work and your economic independence to someone else would be completely barking mad to me really, because the odds are that things might not work out'. Here, Joanna added the notion of 'choice' to her understanding of 'feminism', complicating her notion of equal contribution, and also the concept of economic independence as a safeguard to partnership breakdown.

7.2.3 Part-time working – being held back and holding herself back

I asked Joanna to tell me more about her experiences of working part-time as a health visitor. Again, she stressed how lucky she was that her job was so flexible, with 'nobody breathing down my neck' and that there was just an expectation that she would put in her hours when she could.

She explained that there were 'fewer job opportunities in terms of progressing through the career ladder into management and into teaching'. She had been a Community Practice Teacher prior to children, but 'I ruled myself out of that' by cutting back to twenty-five hours. Now she felt she was 'out of practise' and would have to retrain. Middle managers were often part-time, although she was sure they did extra, unpaid hours at home. She had been working thirty hours for four years and had started another Masters. Nonetheless, she would not return 'full-time', because the expectation would be to do far more than 37.5 hours, particularly at senior management level. In her experience, most female senior managers either did not have children or their children were grown up. Her perception of women previously her peers and now in 'huge jobs', was that they 'chose' to work seventy hours a week, 'and that's not what I want'. She was 'at peace' with herself with her current arrangement, where she delivered what was expected of her and was 'happy to put in the extra for them when it's necessary', and in return she had the flexibility 'to do the things I need to do as a mother'.

Male health visitors were few and far between and tended to move swiftly off into management. Joanna did not feel that women were treated differently if they had children. Rather, she supposed that 'what people do is self-select into certain roles and certain jobs, knowing what the expectations are'.

Joanna again stressed her enjoyment of working with people and learning about people's lives. Whilst 'some people go into management and to different things because they get sick of talking about what they see as the same things', she maintained she never bored of it and enjoyed the variety, working in the community, in and out of people's houses. She enjoyed always having new learning and new approaches to get to grips with. She explained that she actually only did health visiting for half of her hours now, and for the other half, she worked with parents on their relationship with their child, 'which is pure luxury – it's really lovely'.

7.2.4 Joanna's 'career' story: reflections and reorientation

After a break and a cup of tea, we carried on with Joanna's second session. First Joanna talked a little more about the need to 'be there' after school, that the boys would probably be getting on with their own thing, but she felt it was important that someone was there, available for them. As a result, she had almost not done the Masters, despite it being a 'fantastic opportunity' with funding. But they had managed to make it work and her husband had been 'really good'. But he had asked her a couple of times: 'What's happened to your ambition? Have you got no ambition?' She continued, laughing, that he had 'sort of made insinuations' about 'why aren't you doing something?'

Elaborating, she explained: 'I think my perception of myself was that I was career-minded', but she did not think that management was for her, because it involved 'conflict', being 'assertive', 'unpopular' and 'isolated within your role'. Otherwise, there were two options. One was community practice teaching, which she had done before but had become 'unavailable' to her. She had enjoyed it, but found some aspects 'uninspiring'. She thought that probably the best role for her would be some sort of clinical specialist route. Again, moving to a small city meant many of those 'opportunities went'. The Masters in infant mental health had been the 'first opportunity to do something like that' since leaving London nine years' ago. She suggested that 'what I've come to accept is that although I might have denied it to myself, actually I'm not a high flying career kind of person' and that she had learnt 'not to compare myself to other people who have left me behind, in that they are now strategic managers of this, that and the other'. Rather she put 'mental energies into other things', like learning. She continued:

Having children has made that easier. Because they can be my excuse, and my focus really, for not sort of pursuing other arenas that maybe on paper it looks as if I should have. You know, I'll be like 'Joanna Three Degrees', but you're still just health visiting? ... I've not sort of translated that into climbing the career ladder...I think I did sort of have this sort of view of myself that I could do all that if I wanted to...But I don't know that I actually could, really. So I'm quite happy being a health visitor.

I asked about Joanna's plans for the future, once the children had left home. She envisaged taking a specialist route, either supporting teenage parents or in infant mental health. She would have to commute to pursue either of these and there was 'no way' she would do this now, because she wanted to 'be there' when the children got home from school. She explained that her husband's disability might mean he will need to go part-time, by the time the children leave – and this may impact her decision on whether to return full-time:

So I suppose I sort of see myself working and developing my career to... One, because I enjoy it, and two, because I want to be able to support them, in doing whatever, if they go to university – you know – please god... And that's going to cost a lot of money.

In contrast to previously in her story where she had referred to her work as 'just a job', here Joanna referred to her 'career' and that she saw herself 'developing' it.

7.3 Sara's story of sustained part-time working

Sara is a freelance TV producer, having taken voluntary redundancy last year from her employer of twenty-three years. Her husband is a senior executive at the same broadcaster. They have three daughters aged twelve, sixteen and eighteen. Sara opened her story by explaining that after a degree in Classics, she began to consider working in documentaries, 'because I think people and places are fascinating'. Initially she worked in commercials, as a way to 'get a foot in the door' and get her Union ticket. She 'held out' to work in documentaries, thinking that anthropological films might be where she wanted to focus. After her first documentary job, which she thoroughly enjoyed, she moved out of London to the highly-regarded broadcasting unit where she had worked up until last year.

Her first assignment was 'right along the lines of my degree'. However, the unit specialised in an area of scientific documentaries, where she felt at a disadvantage. She described the company as being years behind television companies in London: 'a heavily male bastion of a unit', with only four female producers, none of whom had families. She started out as a production assistant, but managed to make the switch from administrative to largely male editorial side, and was 'one of the first to do so', despite not having a

scientific degree associated with the Unit's core area of film-making. But it took her quite some time, 'just because there were quite blinkered views on it'. She argued that her perspective as a non-scientist was extremely useful, bearing in mind most of the audience were non-specialists. By the time she made it into the editorial side and started working as a researcher, which she loved, she was in her early thirties.

She turned at this point to fill in the previous couple of years in her personal life, including getting together with her partner. The 'tricky start' to this relationship had coincided with a number of emotionally difficult experiences, including sexual harassment at work and the re-kindling of a relationship with her father who had left the family when she was ten. However, she got through this period and her partner 'to his credit, stuck with me' and they got married. Sara suggested that although she had made it to researcher, she was never going to be a 'blue-chipper', that this did often require specialist scientific research.

But I knew I wanted children and, being a researcher and getting to that point coincided with me being 32 and I had all those hormones going on, saying 'now, now!'. And I suppose they're very strong. You either have them or you don't and some people have a strong career ambition and I was not so strong...

She stressed that what was important was that she enjoyed her work. She was glad she had moved on from commercials – 'I wouldn't feel that my life's work had been that worthy'. Whereas: 'I had always wanted to work on documentaries to raise awareness of issues, and that's what I've done in all of the programmes, effectively, that's what I've done. And I'm pleased about that'. She concluded that although she had not known that she definitely wanted to be a producer, or a series producer or an executive producer, 'I knew that I was always seeking to find work that would be rewarding in that I would learn new things every day'.

7.3.1 Going back part-time – and keeping going (against the odds)

Sara had her first child in 1994 at thirty-three: 'That was fabulous, that was great...I knew that it was going to be an issue about how I carried on working, but it wasn't so much an issue that I wouldn't have a child because of it'. She was one of the first to go part-time as a researcher. She referred to changes going on in the Unit at the time, with a shift from just filming what the producers were interested in to being required to develop much stronger stories – indicating this may have made it easier for her to make a change. So she carried on and managed to get a job on quite a good 'blue-chip' series. As it happened, she fell pregnant again and was not able to finish the series: 'it was a shame that it was on that

production because it would have been good', but she was not unhappy about it because she always knew she wanted more than one child and did not want too big a gap.

It was after her second child that it really struck Sara that continuing working in this area of documentaries was going to be really difficult, and more so with 'blue-chip' series, because of all the travelling:

I've always loved travelling and my husband was doing the same job but he was senior. He was unfettered and basically, he could have his cake and eat it. No, I don't mean that, but you know what I mean? He was senior to me and obviously I have the babies and at the time the hormones kicked in with me it was very much 'I want to look after this baby', that's what I wanted to do. And so he continued to work and go up the career ladder, so he became the breadwinner that we needed to rely on more. But I worked all the way through, but just – part-time was the perfect way of doing it because it meant I could have input with the kids.

The *work* of Sara's story here was to make it clear that her work was still a very important part of her life, but that simultaneously she felt compelled to care for her children herself – working part-time was thus articulated as the 'perfect' way to do both. Nonetheless, by bringing into the story at this juncture her husband's 'unfettered' position and continued career progression, she makes apparent her frustration at the impact on her position at work. She knocks back her own comment with 'no, I don't mean that, but you know what I mean?', and is able to rationalise how it made sense for her to go part-time and him to become the main breadwinner. But she counters this with 'but I worked all the way through, but just...', cutting herself off by resuming her rationalisation for part-time work.

Sara described working part-time three days a week at this early stage as working well in terms of caring for her children - she was able to use the organisation's new nursery and later, was 'not a complete alien at the school gates'. She described a 'little bit of a tug' regarding nursery: 'an institution' where 'somebody else was doing your job'. Nonetheless, she 'might have gone doolally' staying at home every day, and suggested she was 'not particularly good at playing jigsaws' or 'painting *with* them'. However:

I have to admit that I didn't feel great leaving. If you can imagine working Monday and Tuesday and then I'd have Wednesday off and then maybe Thursday I'd go back in and then say goodbye for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. It did feel lightweight in terms of the work.

So, although the part-time set up was 'perfect' in terms of enabling her to do both, she felt 'lightweight' at work. After her second child, Sara took a step back to work in a commercial arm that made films using archive footage, so that she did not need to travel, which she described as being 'quite good for me'. She noted that there were other couples in the Unit who had taken it in turns to go off filming and/or had had parents to help. However, her husband's senior role made it very difficult for him to cover for her if she were to go away and they had no parental help available. In the end, they got an au pair, giving them five hours daily help at home enabling her to do a little filming. This coincided with her eldest going to school. She did not want to put her in after school club every day, since her day was 'long enough' as a four year old. They had a series of au pairs for eleven years, some of them 'superb', until their youngest went to secondary school.

'And then I had my third – god, I know it was stupid!' Sara announced at this point, laughing. She had not felt 'finished' with two, and with her third daughter she felt 'complete'. She continued:

Life didn't really change, you know! I'd managed to keep working part-time with the au pair with two and it was just the same with the third. Now whether they saw me at work in any other way, I don't know – as somebody who wasn't going to be that committed? Maybe they did. I think, again, with that sort of way of thinking they'd probably expect you to have – if you've gone down the road of having one baby, most people expect you to have another, but when you go and have a third, it's slightly making a statement, isn't it?

Sara continued to work three days a week on a range of projects, predominantly using archive footage: 'but what was lovely was that you were still writing your story and you were still having to visualise your story, and you were in the cutting room putting it all together and then doing the commentary and all the rest of it'. She did gradually get back into doing some filming, usually in the UK, but with occasional overseas trips. This was important to her both in terms of acquiring experience and for her own enjoyment. Some of the projects were sold internationally and not always seen by her colleagues, but she reaped a great deal of satisfaction from raising and tackling important issues. During this time she progressed to being an Assistant Producer.

Five years ago when her youngest was about seven, she had to agree to go back up to four days a week for a particular job. She worked on this show for four years, 'and survived over the course of those years a number of redundancies, because of the recession – and then the last time the redundancy came up, I thought I wanted a change, I'd been here twenty three years'. During this time she explained that she had 'gone up to producer

level and it was great, it was good, because I always had my Friday off which worked really, really well’.

7.3.2 Making sense of ‘career’: resentments, frustrations and achievements

Sara’s story turned to making sense of her career and where she had ended up. She talked about employment issues that made her ‘cross’, for example being kept at ‘acting’ assistant producer for years. However, she positioned the issues as widespread and not just relating to her, or to those working part-time. Her sense making took a number of twists and turns over the course of the subsequent storytelling:

I appreciate that over the course of my career I might not have reached the highest heights and I might have had struggles and labels put on me and not had this, and not had that. But I decided to have three children ...

She described her employer as having ‘helped’ her be a presence in her children’s lives through providing nursery care and ‘allowing’ her to work part-time. She was ‘grateful’ for this, not knowing whether ‘people in publishing or advertising’ or similar areas were able to work part-time, ‘and I’ll overlook all the other things, because there are other things, but there’s nothing you can do about them’. This she related to working in ‘a very, very demanding industry’. She proposed that if you *both* work in a demanding industry:

...you can both try your hardest to scale the heights and all the rest of it, if you want, and not make any compromises and I think there are consequences of that decision for your children. I, we made a decision that I would compromise. And I really think that when I look back on it, I’ve had a really good career. It’s not over, because I’m still working – I’m just not staff at (employer).

Here, Sara provided a strong rationale for their decision for her to compromise, but then countered the notion of compromise by stating that she had enjoyed ‘a really good career’ and that this was not over. Nonetheless, her reference to ‘I’m just not staff’ hinted at some tension regarding loss of status. She went on:

The thing that’s been hard has been that there is a hierarchy in the unit... so my situation has been one of feeling torn. It’s a very strange emotion – it’s in quite a lot of areas. So when I’m in work there’s pressure to achieve and to go up the ladder, and I feel that, I get sucked into that when I’m at work, I want to be doing that. So you see people going up the ladder who were, two years before, working below you. That’s difficult to have to try and cope with – and that’s at work. Then, when I’m at home, I feel sometimes I haven’t had the ability to concentrate on all sorts of things.

By this point, Sara had become very emotional and was crying as she described the guilt she sometimes felt. She expressed how working part-time could feel like the best of both worlds, but that you were often outside of things, not part of things.

You can end up, working part-time, feeling a little bit sub - so you're sub at work because you haven't managed to quite make the grade or push and there's people who are really giving it all that they've got. Then at home you can feel ok, well at least I'm around for my kids, but you still can't be around for everything for them, because you are still working... Working part-time can sometimes feel the best compromise and then sometimes it can feel a bit shit. That's life isn't it? But I would say that it is difficult and there are times when I think I can almost, I'll be honest with you, I can feel a bit of resentment towards my husband as well. Not him personally, but I just think 'you just don't know how lucky you are to be able to concentrate and not have, every time...'

At this juncture, Sara broke off her story, to explain how she had just turned down a 'brilliant' job because it would have meant being away filming from mid-August, just when her daughters' A level and GCSE results would come through. 'I'm their mother', she said and this was a 'huge event' for them, 'and it's that that pisses me off. So I can't go and also I can't go because it's the school summer holidays and (husband) will be working and so, for family reasons, I say no'. She was also emotional, she said, because of her eldest having just finished school. Her husband was away on his annual fishing trip. She swore when she mentioned this, quickly adding 'it's all right, we have a strong marriage, we've been together for twenty-three years. He thinks I'm always against his fishing, and I'm not'.

In this way, she was explaining how she resented her husband's position of freedom to concentrate on his work – when compared to her own sense of constraint and compromise. She could rationalise why she had felt compelled to say no to this job, but nonetheless felt angry about it. She continued by reiterating how it had made sense for her husband to continue focusing on his career and for her to compromise. She supposed this stemmed from her husband always having been ahead of her and having a PhD pertinent to the core 'blue-chip' films, so 'we were never equal'. She had also been the one who wanted to look after the children, 'there was no question of me saying 'oh, let's share this' – I wanted to do it'. Again, she emphasised her achievements: 'However, despite the fact that I haven't had (core scientific subjects) and the fact that I'm a woman and the fact that I've had three children, I've actually made it to producer in an incredibly difficult environment'. She outlined the projects that she had done so far as a freelancer, continuing:

So I'm seen as a player and I'm seen as somebody who's good at directing presenters, good at directing and a good film maker, so I should feel proud that I've done that against all the odds – and held down three children and been a good presence for them. But it has been a struggle. And I think what I get pissed off about is that (husband) is now an exec, so he goes to all these film festivals...

She wanted her husband to be able to go away and recognised that his job was stressful, 'but I have always felt a little bit like I'm there doing a lot more than him. I'm always the one that cooks the meals in the evenings'. However, having revealed a sense of frustration at doing more than him at home, she countered this by proposing that he would always help, if asked, was 'never, ever moody' and a 'really good help around the house'. She understood he needed a break, but she also felt she needed a break sometimes, although he would 'never stand in her way'. Again, she was suggesting here that it was partly her, not asking him to do more and not taking more breaks, rather than anything he had done.

So I can't be resentful, but he does have a good life. He does have a good time. He has a very high profile job, which he enjoys, even though it's stressful. And he manages to have a house and his children and generally speaking it's all looked after for him and I just think we haven't really moved on that far, have we?

Sara concluded this narrative thread by confirming that she would have felt 'selfish' if she had continued to 'pursue my own life along the lines that I could have done before having children'. She was not sure what she was advocating – not that women should not work, but perhaps that men should play a much stronger role.

7.3.3 Sara's 'career' story: reflections and disorientation

Sara's second session continued after a break. This started with her immediate reflections on the stories she had told and included two pertinent areas of elaboration: the first regarding how she felt about the gender relations in her partnership in terms of her working part-time and him continuing in his full-time career; the second relating to how things were going as a freelancer.

'I never wanted to be 'the wife'', Sara explained. She had grown up with a 'hatred' of the idea of the 50's wife, ready at home at the beck and call of her husband – 'I will not answer to a man in that respect and that could be because of the situation in my life with my father'. She had a 'real dislike' of some of her friends' husbands who had carried on, their roles 'unchanged' after marriage, leaving their wives to the 'lion's share' of work at home. She continued:

Although I have moments with (husband) where I think it's uneven, I have an understanding of the bigger picture and generally we're good. What I would say is that I feel that he and I think as a team. That's the way we come to it... We're married, we're a team and we've raised a family. We need to do the things in life that enable us, as a family, to live well. That means that we need to bring in a certain amount of money... And at the moment, the way things are is that it's better for him to be doing – and I see that what I'm doing is allowing him to do that well and raise our children well, but I'm also very, very importantly working and bringing in money. I need to – I want to feel that I'm making that contribution to our lives.

In this way, Sara highlighted the importance of taking into account *overall* contribution to the work involved in raising a family. However, whilst it rationally made sense for it to be her husband who pursued the full-time career, she stressed the importance to her that she was contributing financially (unlike the 50's housewife). She continued:

Then we fall into certain – after 20 years, certain roles suit him best and certain roles suit me best. There's no point in me railing about the fact that he should be cooking, because he's not great at it... but he would do other things that I'm not great at, and generally it's fine, it all works really well. He certainly doesn't think of me as the little woman and he certainly doesn't think of himself as being in any way superior to me. If anything, I'd say he probably thinks that, in terms of being able to do his job well, he's extremely good and he's extremely high up, but there are an awful lot of other things that he needs propping up on. I think he thinks that I can juggle a lot of balls in the air well and I think he's full of admiration for that. So generally it works.

Thus Sara illustrated that for her, teamwork was as much about mutual respect and valuing each other's contribution as it was about how they split the domestic chores.

When I asked Sara to tell me more about her move to freelancing, she explained that after four years on her last show at (employer), she had been a bit bored, trapped and worried that she was not seen as a 'blue-chipper'. She did not want to be 'wishing away' five years until her husband retired. When the last redundancy came round, she 'didn't want to be picked', but rather 'wanted to make the decision myself'. Sometimes it was good to 'jump', to make things happen. It was a good redundancy package, she could be around more for her eldest daughter's last year of school, and would be able to get freelance work. She had worked on a couple of projects which had been great, but was realising that freelancing could be 'feast or famine' – so very full-on when she was working and then feeling a 'bit twitchy' in between. So, 'it all started off fine'. She continued:

But I still knew that I might have a hiccup and it would just come a bit later, about – what have I done? Have I done the right thing? What’s my identity? And it’s huge. It’s huge about my identity.... I’m very aware of them saying ‘so what are you doing today? What have you got planned today?’ I hate that question now I’m not working. I feel – unless I’ve got something fascinating lined up, I feel a failure. So it’s very, very wrapped up with my identity, working...

Whilst Sara was able to provide a rationale for taking voluntary redundancy, as she talked, it was clear that she felt a certain amount of *disorientation* with regards to her decision to leave her job for freelancing and how this was impacting on her identity. She ‘hated it’ when she did not have work and this made her feel ‘a failure’. As the following extract illustrates, a sense of panic crept into her account as she questioned her decision with ‘what have I done?’ and a note of fatalism with her reference to ‘not getting any younger’.

We don’t live in a perfect world and I’m sitting here thinking a little bit like that – ‘what have I done?’ And I’m aware that I’m not getting any younger, that the industry is quite – there’s always a new wave of younger people coming in. But I’ve got experience and that pays. When you’re a producer you write, you direct, you organise and set up and you manage people and you’ve got to be good at all those things... It’s a horrible feeling, knowing that you’ve got these talents, but no one’s needing them. You feel a bit unwanted if the phone isn’t ringing.

But at least the phone had rung twice, and that had been ‘exciting’, and she had had time with the girls: ‘so, so far, it’s going ok’. But she was feeling ‘twitchy’ and in this closing section, she suddenly revealed that there may well be a point when she might ‘need to move on and get a new direction’, and that she had plans: ‘unfortunately, they’re not paid jobs, but I’m thinking I’d like to be a magistrate’. It would be something completely different, she explained, and something she felt she could do well and would gain from, in terms of experiences of people from different walks of life. She was also interested in trying to get a trusteeship in the art world. She had ‘started the process’ of looking ahead, but felt for the moment she probably needed to concentrate on paid work.

7.4 Conclusion

Both Joanna and Sara had set out in ‘professional’ careers and pre-children their stories were about how they made their way into their careers and were progressing, up until they had children and went part-time. They showed considerable commitment to and passion for their chosen professions.

Both women were resisting a perceived, growing expectation of *resumption* of a full-time career focus. This was primarily justified by maintaining that their teenage children still needed them at home, at least some of the time after school. The dialectic pull between 'mothering' and 'working' remained in place. But the requirement for ideological work shifted over time from the 'mothering' side (the tension releasing over time as part-time working began to *enable* achievement of mothering expectations) to the 'working' side, where the requirement for managing tensions tended to increase over time. Joanna and Sara worked in contrasting professional and organisational cultures and their stories told in this chapter revealed their very different experiences of working part-time. Joanna's story of part-time working as a health visitor provided an example of part-time working as commonplace in a strongly female profession, whilst Sara worked in TV production in a predominantly male unit where part-time working was highly unusual. Joanna had remained in the same role, stepping off the career ladder to management, whilst Sara had continued to progress, albeit *relatively* slowly. The stories revealed that the degree of tension relating to their 'career' stories was strongly linked to the extent to which they *experienced* what felt like a lack of 'success' or fulfilment from work.

This was more strongly felt in Sara's story, where she was made to feel 'sub' or less committed, *compared to* her colleagues, and was reminded of her relatively lower status as a 'non-blue-chipper', and comparatively slow progression as others overtook her. This was exacerbated by her husband's rise to an executive position in the same company. She was able to construct her 'career' story very positively from time to time, by emphasising her highly honed skills and progression against the odds, as well as fulfilment from raising important issues. However, this was constantly contradicted, revealing acute tension between what she had achieved and what she was made to feel she could (or should) have achieved – and between whether she was seen as a 'player' or as 'sub' compared to her colleagues. Continuing to resist the pressure to resume a full-time career focus, she had taken voluntary redundancy, rather than risk being pushed – something she stated feeling vulnerable to, as a part-time 'non-blue-chipper' (a less than 'ideal' worker). Her story revealed a narrative of *disorientation*, as she struggled to make sense of her current position and what she might do looking forward. Within the context of such a demanding culture, it was extremely hard to resist the discourse of career as progression, with little opportunity for *reorientation*. There were hints of this possibility, if her freelancing developed into regular, fulfilling work, but Sara was still struggling with adapting to the highs and lows of freelancing.

Joanna was less exposed to such experiences and reminders, since she had followed a well-trodden path of part-timers who had similarly stepped off the ladder to management.

Hence, both practically, due to the flexible nature of her role, and socio-ideologically, it had been *easier* for Joanna working part-time. She had had the added support of a husband sharing childcare for the first eight years. Joanna's story did not show up tensions through contradictions in the storyline. But close attention to the *work* of her story revealed resistance to an expectation to resume a full-time career focus, through repeated reference to not being career-minded nor interested in a management role. This was accentuated by reiterating that her husband had resumed his career which had by now 'taken off', whereas she had taken a 'different path'. Whilst part-time working and stepping off the career ladder was normalised and easy to do, Joanna still acknowledged an expectation of progression, through referencing her peers in 'big jobs', her husband's questioning of her loss of ambition and herself as 'Joanna three degrees, but still just a health visitor'. 'Being there' for her children was her core justification for not resuming her 'career', but distancing herself from management by stressing negative characteristics such as overwork, conflict and unpopularity, also contributed to managing the tension. Moreover, having gone through a period where she was 'stuck', Joanna had more recently had the opportunity for *reorientation*, through developing specialist skills and knowledge, and injecting variety into her working life, through two different roles. This enabled her to *reframe* career 'success' from progression to a senior role to self-development and fulfilment from work that she was passionate about, felt was worthwhile and was able to do expertly. She could also see further opportunities for developing her clinical specialism in the future – even describing this as picking up on developing her 'career'.

Chapter 8

More stories of sustained part-time working (as a mother)

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the key findings illustrated through Joanna and Sara's stories (Ch.7) will be explored in relation to the other eighteen stories. First, some of the groundwork already laid in previous chapters, in terms of 'career' or 'work' stories, will be summed up.

In the section describing the participants (4.3.3), only five had progressed in job level/status beyond their pre-children position (Table 5) - over a period of at least thirteen years and for some over two decades. Even for these women this was perceived to be slow progress relative to full-timers (as per Sara's story, 7.3, and also for Teresa and Tanya), or had incorporated limiting their potential through for example working at a small organisation (as per Sam's story, 5.3). In the course of the previous chapters, I have touched on some patterns of experience of working part-time. For example, the four mothers (Denise, Paula, Carol, Charlotte) who returned to work full-time after their first child, but ended up taking career breaks after their second, returning a few years' later in lower level jobs. Or, the five mothers (Susannah, Harriet, Karen, Steph and more recently, Sara) who have turned to self-employment to manage work and caring for children, but in doing so stepped back and/or removed themselves from a career 'ladder'. Or, the pattern of those five mothers (Cara, Denise, Paula, Jessica and recently, Judith) who have ended up changing jobs altogether and working in alternative jobs at a lower level. I will reference these, but my intention is not to focus on analysing such patterns, since that would be better achieved through larger scale, ideally longitudinal quantitative research. In this chapter, I am specifically interested in the impact of sustained part-time working on women's 'career' or 'work' identity, so will be exploring the meaning they attached to 'career' or 'work', and how they made sense of where they had ended up.

As outlined in Chapter 6, all participants suggested that some compromise to their jobs had been required in order to go part-time and make work fit with caring for young children. Mothering stories were inextricably linked with working stories. The narratives of *struggle* and *prioritisation* related to the core dialectic tension between trying to 'be there' for their children and simultaneously for their work. Compromises and adjustments were mainly made during the early phase of going part-time and often again, with subsequent children and then as their children entered primary school. Already made clear from these stories, was a sense of lack of anticipation and planning. Often the extent of compromises made and certainly the *sustaining* of part-time work into secondary school had not usually been anticipated. With an 'empty nest' approaching, the mothers stressed

not wanting to 'mess up' or 'miss out' on the last years of mothering children at home. Part-time working was no longer creating tension around mothering expectations. Indeed it was shown to *enable* 'good' mothering of older children.

In previous chapters, I have proposed that the stories tended to be told through a lens of making sense of a *lack* of 'success' in their career. In re-telling Joanna and Sara's stories of sustained part-time working, this was illustrated as core to the narrative of *resumption* that framed the stories by setting up expectations relating to 'progression', 'part-timers' and 'contribution'. 8.2 will further explore these inter-related tensions across the stories. Overall, the findings will illustrate that whilst tensions relating to the impact of sustained part-time working on achieving mothering expectations have tended to lessen, those tensions relating to achieving 'career' and 'worker' expectations have tended to build.

However, simultaneously, a narrative of *reorientation* developed across the majority of the stories, although with differing levels of engagement. This will be explored in 8.3, starting with the various strategies used to *reframe standards of 'good' working* (8.3.1), in order that alternative fulfilment might be gained from work. This involved resisting resumption to a full-time career focus and a discourse of 'career' success defined by progression in status and earnings. Secondly, the ways in which participants were *reframing the meaning of work within life* are illustrated (8.3.2). Section 8.4 explores the time/space of looking forward to an 'empty nest'. This incorporates the narrative of *disorientation* that was apparent in most stories in some way, although it was often less prominent than that of *reorientation*. Attention will be drawn to the triggers of disorientation and forms this took. Joanna's story told in the previous chapter provided a good example of drawing on a narrative of *reorientation*, and Sara's illustrated a narrative of *disorientation*.

8.2 Resisting a narrative of *resumption* of a full-time 'career' focus

The two stories of mothering (Cara and Sam's in Ch.5) and the two stories of sustained part-time working (Joanna and Sara's in Ch.7) all illustrated a strong narrative thread relating to the work of the stories in justifying why they had not *resumed* a full-time career focus and were *still* working part-time. The continuing, although unanticipated need to 'be there' for teenage children was at the heart of this justification. But Joanna's and Sara's stories relating to their working lives demonstrated that in resisting resumption, they needed to make sense of the consequences of *sustained* part-time working and the matrix of inter-related tensions these consequences set up. In this section, I explore this resistance in more depth, by examining how the participants were positioning themselves and framing the sequence of events in relation to the key sites of tension. They differed in

terms of how dominant they were in the stories. The three key sites I investigate are those relating to 'career' (8.2.1), 'part-timers' (8.2.2) and 'contribution' (8.2.3).

8.2.1 Tension relating to 'career'

All the stories echoed Joanna and Sara's in expressing that 'career' for these university educated women carried with it notions of 'progressing' to a higher role or status. This was associated with having a 'full-time career focus' - that is prioritising work and being in a position to fully focus on doing what it takes to excel and 'progress'.

A common resistance to the notion of 'career' was detected in women positioning themselves as not having a career anymore. Joanna made it clear that stepping off the ladder into management meant she no longer had a 'career', but rather a 'job'. Gabby, although in a relatively senior role, similarly suggested 'actually I don't think I have a career anymore. This is not a 'career' job. Being a professional support lawyer has nowhere to go from it'. Both Steph (online consultant) and her husband had worked part-time throughout, but this has been 'absolutely at the cost of any careers we might have had'. Equally, those who had compromised the type of work they did, as for example Cara had in leaving management consultancy for a manager role in Higher Education, did not feel they were 'career' focused. This could also be suggested by those who felt they had compromised the scale of the work they were doing, for example, working in a small organization, like the local architects' Sam worked at.

Across the stories, there was a sense of expectation of a professional 'career', following university education. Certain educational experiences showed indications of heightening a sense of 'career' expectation, potentially increasing tension regarding subsequent feelings about where they had ended up. These included consistently high academic achievement through school and university. Harriet (market researcher), for example, went to Oxford and talked of the 'high hopes' for her career as a result, but that she had 'not achieved my potential'. A couple of participants referenced the impact of their girls' schools instilling the importance of women achieving through work. Describing her highly selective girls' state school as 'building expectations', Steph explained: 'it was about taking your place in the workplace, being a thinking, contributing - not that you can't do those things either as a mother - but it was rather than going into the home'.

Susannah (multi-media consultant), suggested being the first to go to university from her working-class family had added to her sense of needing to achieve. Whilst the vast majority came from middle-class backgrounds, their expectation of a professional 'career' was often contrasted with their mothers' working (all but three worked in some

capacity) which tended to be 'more' part-time and usually in secretarial, administration or teaching. There were references of parents' expectations regarding going to university, but less so regarding careers. Mostly the expectation of a professional career was assumed in the storytelling, once they had a degree.

Those who had experienced sustained progression in their careers before children, like Cara, could also have greater conflict with the notion of compromising after children. Or indeed, those who felt they were just starting to make it in their career. Paula, for example, had spent years finding her feet in TV production and had just landed a really good job when she had her first child, so was not at a point where she wanted to compromise. On the other hand, already having achieved a lot was also given as a rationale for no longer feeling such 'a push to achieve', which was how Carol felt, to her surprise, on returning to work full-time as a lecturer.

In finding ways to make work fit, many women went into jobs with no or little opportunity for progression. This included those doing self-employed freelance work – Harriet, as a market researcher, Karen, in sales and marketing, and Steph, in online consultancy and coaching. It also included those who had moved to work in schools (Paula, Jessica and Carol). Many women had experienced periods of struggle with further compromises and adjustments until they found something that fitted with caring for children – where they tended to stay. Gabby had moved from a fee-paying to support lawyer role when her children were seven and four, after struggling to manage both roles. Tanya, after years of trying different combinations of shifts and wards as a nurse, had 'carved out' a clinical specialist role for herself. Whilst she mostly spoke positively about her work, the 'flipside' was that she had 'channelled and channelled down a very narrow pathway, so I can't basically do anything else' – she was 'backed into a corner'. Paula, after struggling to cope in TV production with two children, had taken a career break and returned to work in an administrative job in a primary school. She described the relief at not feeling 'guilty' about her children or 'judged' by colleagues regarding commitment. However, after seven years she was feeling frustrated, with no-where to go. Charlotte (marketing manager, 13 years in same company doing similar level jobs) and Denise (practice manager, 6 years doing same job) both talked about having thought about leaving on many occasions, but were worried about finding another part-time job with the same level of flexibility.

Sara and Joanna's stories of sustained part-time working, made it clear that tension around 'progression' was strongly influenced by the organisational and professional culture in which the women were working. In Sara's case, the highly demanding work culture of TV production meant she experienced a sense of *lack* of progression, relative to

colleagues – despite having progressed to TV producer ‘against the odds’. Both Paula (now a primary school administrator) and Susannah (now had her own business providing multi-media content) had ended up leaving the broadcasters they worked for. Their stories also illustrated how difficult it was working part-time in such a demanding business, where the vast majority of colleagues are totally focused on work. Susannah found it hard to continue after turning down a promotion, describing herself as not having any sense of ‘direction’. This resonated with Cara’s story of working in management consultancy, particularly in the private sector, where the working culture was highly pressurised.

In contrast, Joanna’s story was about joining other part-time working women on a second track, rather than carrying on up the ladder to management. Similarly, Teresa (HR) and Charlotte (marketing manager) worked in organisations with reasonable numbers of part-time working women, where the fact this was fairly commonplace made it easier to carry on doing the same job, without a constant reminder that they were not progressing. Nonetheless, Charlotte showed resentment at being twice overlooked for promotion in recent years, and after thirteen years working part-time at the same organization, had now agreed to go full-time. Teresa had eventually agreed to up her hours to 0.8 and then 0.9 in order move up from HR manager to director. She noted:

If someone had told me before I had children that I would spend fourteen years in the same job at the same level, I wouldn’t have believed them. It’s partly that part-time workers are not considered appropriate for senior jobs. Senior jobs are normally advertised as full-time posts. But from the perspective of looking back, I am aware that my career ambition decreased over this period. Balance was more important. Sometimes, when I was aware of friends moving on up through organisations, I had some sense of failing and questioning whether I should be doing more. However, looking back, I was not putting myself forward for promotion and didn’t particularly challenge myself in terms of the work I took on. I wasn’t just protecting balance in terms of time, but also stress... But also by not over-challenging myself, I was able to do justice to my job.

Many stories echoed similar sentiments about staying at the same level for many years. Importantly, this shared narrative indicated that this had not been anticipated. It was partly constructed as being held back because they were part-time, but looking back they suggested they could recognise that they were simultaneously holding themselves back. This, they proposed, was mainly so that they could manage work and home and keep them separate, but also to ensure they did ‘a good job’ (Teresa). On reflection, they referred to

recognising a diminished career ambition. A *struggle* to manage work and family during the early years could add to a reluctance to push themselves forward.

Similar to Joanna (health visitor), Delia (dentist), Di (tax consultant) and Julia (occupational therapist until very recently), had all continued in the same sort of role since going part-time. Within these professions their part-time status had not compromised their ability to do 'a good job', and they retained their *professional* status. Delia, for example, talked of being 'lucky' that she had been 'successful' as a dentist, 'albeit just a general dentist'. However, all three did indicate they were holding themselves back from progressing to a more senior role or partnership, or to a larger organisation.

Justifying holding back often involved distancing themselves from management (or equivalent step up), by positioning it as significantly more stressful and requiring many more hours of commitment to work, usually considerably over the nominal 37-hour threshold. In addition to the 70-hour weeks Joanna (7.2) proposed were the norm in health service management jobs, she also represented management as not for her because it involved 'conflict', being 'assertive', 'unpopular' and 'isolated'. Similar assertions were found across the stories. Another justification for not wanting to move up was that the higher you got, the more it was about administration and managing issues and less about 'doing' the work – also indicated in Joanna's story. In particular, the next step up tended to be positioned as requiring full-time working with less opportunity for flexibility (see 8.2.2).

The way in which most stories framed the chain of events is useful for appreciating how these women felt about where they had ended up. In particular, the sense of lack of anticipation regarding what had happened. This was sometimes in going part-time at all (for example, the four who initially returned full-time), often in the extent of compromises made (illustrated through Cara's and others' stories of *struggle*), and usually in the *sustaining* of part-time working, which they felt required by now a justification. Gabby (professional support lawyer) explained: 'I didn't go into bringing up children with any expectation other than I could do everything. I could temporarily work part-time, then go back to having a career'. She went on to say 'but what I'm doing now, I would *never* have envisaged myself doing that. But doors open don't they, and doors close, and you don't necessarily, I don't think I've necessarily planned my career'. Steph's storytelling also revealed that recognition of the consequences only came later on:

When you are part-time, you lose your place on a career ladder or path is my conclusion. And because we have both gone part-time, that means that we have both, we've opted out...But I didn't realise that I was stepping off something, and what that

would mean in terms of any stepping back on. Which is probably just as well... But I don't find that easy, and nor does my partner, because we were educated for something else, and although we both hate that, you know we don't want to be fixed on status, but there have been moments when that has felt difficult.

A number of women, like Sara, became quite emotional when looking back at their 'careers'. For example, Janey, when telling me about her pre-children life as a vet, something she had always wanted to be. This was told in some detail and was full of the passion and commitment she gave to becoming and being an equine vet, making clear how difficult this had been, particularly in such a male world, but also how much she had thrived on it. She had explained earlier that her response to having her first child, unexpectedly at thirty-seven after giving up on IVF, had been to sell her half of her veterinary practice that she had built up over the previous ten years. There had been no planning for 'what if' and she explained that she would not have been able to contribute equably to the business. Since then she had done part-time work on and off for the practice she sold her business to.

Similar to other women who had stepped back considerably from previous careers, whilst there was a sense of disappointment in Janey's 'career' story, she insisted that the 'compromises as far as my career has gone' had been 'repaid more, many times more, by the experience of being a mother and being around for children and seeing them develop'. Here, fulfilment from being a mother was positioned as a *price worth paying* for loss in her career. This suggestion was repeated across most of the stories. This illustrated the constant inter-connection between 'career' and 'mother' identities, but also showed how 'success' at one pole of the dialectic could create tension through compromise to the other pole, but simultaneously provide consolation which could to some extent release tension. This helps explain how it was possible to simultaneously resent or be disappointed by and accept compromise.

8.2.2 Tension relating to 'part-timers'

In continuing to resist *resumption* of a full-time 'career' focus, all participants identified with being 'part-time' workers. Six women were working over 30 hours, and two of these were working over 37 hours at the time of the sessions (see Table 6). However, as I will illustrate, they continued to position themselves as 'part-time', often by 'othering' full-time workers.

Concurrently, however, many made it clear that as 'part-time' workers, they were vulnerable to a negative discourse of 'part-timers'. This was vividly illustrated in Sara's

story where she was made to feel 'lightweight' for not being there all the time, and 'sub' (suggesting 'below par') for working on productions using archive footage, because she was not available to travel. Her mention of thinking that having three children would be perceived as 'making a statement' was telling (7.3.1). 'Part-timers' thus could entail notions of lack of competence and commitment.

A sense that being part-time positioned them as less than 'ideal' as workers or not doing a 'proper' job again varied by organisational and professional culture - and the nature of the work and how easy this was to do without compromising doing a 'good' job. Tanya (clinical nurse specialist) had experienced feeling less than ideal in jobs on wards, with an emphasis on continuity of care, but in her current role, she suggested it was not obvious to others that she was part-time and 'we're not viewed as the underdogs in the way that part-timers are on the wards'. Janey (vet) referred to part-time working as an equine vet not feeling like doing a 'proper' job' because it was not possible to fully develop client relationships if you were not always available. Some jobs clearly worked more easily as part-time jobs. Joanna talked about the high level of autonomy and thus flexibility she had working as a health visitor. Sam, as an architect, and similarly Di, as a tax consultant, were able to take on a workload that fitted their desired working hours, without this impacting on the work itself or client relationships. Indeed, both were able to 'trade' hours - doing more if required by their employer, but then being able to either charge for additional hours or clock them up so they could use them when it suited them.

Tension connected to feeling less than 'ideal' showed up in contradictions in their stories relating to commitment and doing a 'good' job. This was strikingly evident in Sara's story. Much of the resistance was in the form of insisting that actually, they were working flat out when they were working, often harder and more productively than they perceived some full-time workers were. Tanya (clinical nurse specialist) talked of 'giving her all' for the three days at work, and worrying about clinical issues and covering care during the two days at home. Susannah (multi-media content) asserted that she had 'never not worked more than they're expecting' and that 'working mothers are more efficient'.

As already indicated (8.2.1), many women talked of holding back in order to do a 'good' job, rather than risking doing a less 'good' job at a higher level. Karen (self-employed sales and marketing) talked of 'over-delivering' and 'undercharging', but being 'very happy with that' because it bought her 'peace of mind'. Later she added: 'I really don't like letting people down and I don't like being wrong'. In addition to justifying lack of progress, seeking to over-deliver could also be to make up for or avoid a *perceived* lack of commitment and competence as 'part-timers'.

Indeed, across all the stories there was a clear emphasis on retaining a strong work ethic, both in terms of commitment to work and doing a 'good' job. The fact that working was an important part of who they were, and that they would continue working, was assumed (as per the four stories told in detail). Furthermore, the use of a narrative of *struggle* to frame stories of managing work and caring for young children (dominant in seven stories and a strong presence in all but four) was in part shown to be about positioning themselves as not having *given up* on their commitment to work. The narrative made clear that compromises had often been unanticipated and that they were still focused on doing a 'good' job, a 'professional' job. Thus even amongst those who experienced less discrimination as 'part-timers', the *work* of the stories indicated an appreciation of the discourse of 'part-timers' and a resistance to connotations of lacking commitment and competence. For example, the self-employed participants explained that they did not reveal their part-time status to clients, as Steph (online consultant) put it, 'in order to maintain professionalism'.

Teresa, in her position as HR director, reflected on the interconnected mix of organisational perceptions of 'part-timers' and internalised perceptions resulting in part-time workers putting in 'extra effort' to 'prove their worth':

But I do think, and partly because jobs aren't sized so well, that puts pressure on the individual who is part-time. They'll think 'oh I've got so much to do and I've got to get it done and if I don't get it done there is some risk that they'll say 'well actually this isn't a part-time job, you need to do more hours to get this done'. ...I think I do it myself, if I'm working a short day, I think I'd better work through lunch because I'm leaving at three...So I don't think it's just about other people's perceptions about part-time, I think it's about our own perceptions ... and wanting to prove your worth. All the stats show that actually part-time work is more productive because the people do put in that extra effort and you are so grateful.

Tension was amplified where working hard and doing a 'good' job was not valued. Sara's story showed resentment at still being perceived as less than 'ideal', despite working four full days for the four years up until she left. Or it was heightened when women were working many more hours than they were contracted to, yet still having to deal with 'part-timer' connotations – this had quite often been the case early on, when part-time jobs were negotiated from full-time positions. For example Susannah (correspondent at the time) talked of doing a 'full time job in part-time hours' and having to work 'very, very hard'.

In some stories, 'part-timer' also incorporated being made to feel an 'outsider' (Gabby) or 'left out' (Carol). Many had experienced different levels of working hours. Charlotte (marketing manager), reported a significant difference between two days as an outside consultant, where absence was expected, to two days as an employee, where she was highly conscious of being seen as a 'part-timer' who was 'swanning in and out'. She had felt more 'part of it' as she increased her hours. Only three women were now working less than three days, with six working over thirty hours. Fourteen had increased their hours in recent years. The pattern of their working hours also made a difference. Paula (primary school administrator) and Tanya (clinical nurse specialist) both worked twenty-four hours. However, Paula worked these across four school days so felt very much part of the team, whilst Tanya worked her hours over three very full days, and was still conscious of her absence on the other two days being an issue. There were also some mentions of feeling 'outside of things' (Helen) by doing self-employed freelance work – this tended to be more related to being self-employed, but these women had all moved to self-employment to be able to work part-time flexibly, so the two were entwined. Working through lunch and not joining in socialising was also mentioned (for example by Gabby, professional support lawyer) as making part-time workers feel like 'outsiders'. This was in tension with the fact that they were doing this to be as productive as possible.

Participants tended to associate issues with being part-time rather than being a woman. The majority maintained not to have experienced discrimination previously as full-time working women. A few, like Sara and Janey (equine vet) referred to the difficulties of being a woman in a very male world. Janey had just stopped all but monthly weekend work at the practice she had been working at intermittently since selling them her own business. She said this was due to the lack of respect she felt women, and particularly herself as a part-time working woman, had from the male partners. There was next to no experience of men working part-time in participants' organisations, hence by default 'part-time' workers in these professional jobs were invariably women. There were a few mentions (for example, Charlotte, marketing manager) of flexible working becoming more usual, including working from home, and that this was making it easier for part-time working women. Teresa (HR director) reflected on the 'mind-set' regarding part-time workers that was often working just under the surface. She suggested that if asked, the senior managers in her organisation would say that part-time working was 'fantastic', and that they supported it. But if someone applied for a job and asked to work part-time 'I know they'll find every reason without explicitly saying it to offer it to one candidate over another. It's almost like a taboo thing that you can't talk about because it's almost like saying I'm racist or something – I'm part-timist'.

Resentment and frustration at being perceived and treated as a 'part-timer' was often contradicted by references to being 'lucky' that they had been able to work part-time, and that they were 'grateful' to employers. Often this positioned them relative to 'others' who were less fortunate and served to make compromises more palatable. Sara, for example, suggested that 'other things can be overlooked' as a result of this feeling of gratefulness to her employer for making part-time working feasible, and positioned herself as 'lucky' compared to those working in cultures such as advertising and publishing where she did not think part-time working was possible.

In the previous section on tension relating to 'career', 'othering' management included 'othering' full-time workers, since progression further up the ladder was considered to require full-time working. Women tended to distance themselves from full-time working *per se*. They did this primarily by positioning full-time workers as *overworking* and focusing on the fact that work dominated and made their lives highly stressful. Some women were 'hanging onto' part-time, even if only just (like Teresa, working 0.9 and Sam working 0.85) to maintain a *sense* of flexibility and control over their time – the peace of mind that they could drop things or be absent occasionally if they were needed at home. Thus the way in which women were positioning themselves was highly dependent on the specific context or time/space involved. At one point in the story they might be emphasising how very hard they worked (resisting and resenting connotations of 'part-timer'), whilst elsewhere could be seemingly contradicting this by 'othering' full-timers for overworking, in a bid to justify continued resistance to resumption of full-time working.

8.2.3 Tension relating to 'contribution'

The widening gap between where the women *had* ended up and where they *could* have ended up had also resulted for the majority in the gap widening between them and their partners in terms of career status and earnings. Over time three quarters had become secondary earners (earning less or usually little more than before children), with their husbands becoming very much the main breadwinner. Prior to children more than a third referred to earning more than their partners, with most contributing fairly equally and only two indicating they had always been secondary earners. In this section, I will discuss identified sources of tension relating to how they made sense of their 'contribution' – firstly, with regards to paid work, then following on with unpaid domestic work.

The stories tended to suggest a strong sense of the 'need' to contribute. This could be expressed in terms of not being totally dependent on their partner, as in Joanna (7.2) and Cara's (5.2) stories. It was also indicated through the vast majority claiming they had always worked, and would always work, even if they did not strictly 'need' to, financially.

Only two had considered giving up work altogether (see 6.3.2.5). Judith, who gave up her job as an occupational therapist between our interviews, and was now doing what she described as 'low-level jobs', still described working and contributing to be 'hugely important' to her. She, like many others, referred to the importance of working as a 'role model' for her children.

Simultaneously, the majority contended at some point in their story that they were *not* driven by money. This could be with reference to earnings compared to where they could have been. Jessica, having recently retrained as a School Business Manager, suggested she was earning half her previous rate as an accountant, and would have been earning 'three, four or five times' her current salary, had she continued full-time as an accountant. Nonetheless, she described herself as 'much, much happier' and was 'educated enough that I don't have to work just for money'. She also talked of her experience as an accountant giving her an insight into the relationship between money and happiness – 'and the ones with the most money were the most miserable ones, to be honest'.

The contention of not being driven by money could also be linked to an argument for not needing 'another' higher salary or more than they currently earned. This could lead to 'othering' of dual high-earning couples, positioning them as materialistic. Delia (dentist) referenced the financial impact of not progressing to dental practice owner:

In the long term, if you have your own practice, you have something to sell when you retire, so ultimately that's your little nest egg. Obviously when I leave, all that kind of goodwill that I've built up over the years, I won't financially benefit from that. Actually I don't really mind, because it's meant that I have a nice time with my family... Some people are really driven and want to forge that path and have that successful practice and earn lots of money and have a flash car...

There was some acknowledgement that they were talking from a privileged position, with regards to being 'relatively' well off in their partnerships and thus able to 'choose' part-time, in contrast to women whose households have little or no income coming in from a partner. As Steph (online consultant) commented: 'becoming a parent and wanting to be an engaged and involved mother has affected my earning potential.' Nonetheless, she was forceful in arguing that 'things aren't what matter most', and pointed out that they could always sell their house: 'we middle-class people always have options, don't we?'

Another sign of resistance to *resumption* of full-time working came in the form of an argument that over time, as the gap had widened for many between their earnings and their husbands, the more it had made *rational* sense for their husband to continue with

their career focus. As Karen (self-employed sales and marketing) noted, 'that's kind of what has held me back from doing more work in the past. Because if I can work for a day and earn sort of a quarter of what he can do, then why bother?'

Most participants constructed their contribution at home as 'fair'. This was despite the fact that a usually unintended consequence of sustained part-time working was that the majority had ended up taking on more of the domestic work than their husbands and almost all indicated that they had responsibility for the home from an organisational point of view. Many inferred that it was 'fair' since they were working fewer hours and had more time at home - thus doing more of the domestic work was 'kind of part of the bargain thing' (Jessica, school business manager).

However, many participants, having rationalised doing more at home as 'fair' were quick to suggest that 'I think if we went back to working 50/50 again it would probably go more 50/50 I think' (Jessica) or that it *could* have been the other way round. They also often mentioned that it had been shared equally before children and that the division had shifted dependent on circumstances. These retorts indicated a certain amount of tension relating to gender and roles, and as I will illustrate further, there was a tendency to resist the notion that they had 'chosen' this traditional model of gender relations, or that this was their orientation - rather they positioned it as a *consequence* of their working part-time.

Denise (practice manager) illustrated these points well:

I've probably slipped far more back into a stereotypical feminine female role than I thought that I might have done when I embarked, probably, on my career. When we were first together, I did try and draw a line of we did everything - the aim was 50/50, and it was probably in reality 60/40. But, it wasn't bad for the time. Then it did, it slipped more, when he was working more and I wasn't - but I felt that was kind of fair. If it had been the other way around and I'd been out working full-time....

Picking up on Karen's story again, where she talked about her and her husband's contribution, she suggested that 'I totally protected him, so that his career could be his main focus'. She later explained that she felt a 'slight guilt' when not working, and that 'I therefore had to do something to contribute to his ability to work'. Unusually, compared to the other participants, this had resulted in her taking on almost all of the domestic work. However, by the second session, she was getting involved in a new venture (8.3.1.2) and working overall around forty hours. Her husband had given up his corporate job the previous year, and was doing two days voluntary work and managing the couple's

properties from home. This had lead them to switch roles and 'he's become a total housewife'. This story is a good example of the fluidity of gender relations and the fact that they were not fixed.

As was apparent from Joanna and Sara's stories (Ch.7), assessment of 'fairness' depended on the context in which they were weighing this up. For example, Sara talked of her 'sharing' as relatively good – compared to some of her friends, whose husbands did next to nothing. Others (for example Delia and Judith) referred to their husbands doing considerably more than their own fathers had. Both Sara and Joanna referred to it being 'fair' when total contribution to providing for and looking after a family was taken into consideration, and this was consistently put forward in the stories. The fact that the earnings gap had widened, for some by a large margin, could be compounding a sense that it was 'only fair' to take on responsibility for home. This was apparent in Sara's story (7.3.2), although this was not without some resentment, and in Karen's story, during the time her husband was working full on in a high-earning job. Paula (school administrator) went through a long list of how they divided their tasks, but then concluded with: 'I mean I do more, because he works longer hours and he brings in our main income, by far in a way our main income, so by my reckoning (pause) – and because I can, because I have Friday off, I do the lion's share of the work in the house'.

It seems likely that as Joanna suggested, based on her observations through her work as a health visitor, division of domestic work was more of an issue in the early years of parenting – partly because of the sudden unexpected shift from sharing equally to the woman doing more because they were at home, and partly because of the enormous amount of juggling and feeling overburdened with young children. As discussed in the chapters on mothering, timing of meals had become much less pressured, and teenagers were more able to do things themselves (6.3.1.1). Indeed in most households they did at least help out 'a bit' with chores. This was an area I often had to prompt on to find out more about how they managed things with their partners. Most participants suggested that these days they did not think much about how they divided domestic work, and as Jessica put it, they had over the years 'fallen' into a pattern.

Mostly tasks were divided rather than each task shared, and this was described as being 'easier' (for example by Paula). Certain tasks, like cooking and shopping were more likely to be shared. Tanya (clinical nurse specialist) referred to her and her husband's 'fairly stereotype roles' that meant their division of chores had mostly 'fallen down traditional gender lines'. She suggested that 'although both of us would kick against that', they divided things based on their likes and dislikes and by what was practical – so she did

most of the cooking and he did most of the driving. This rationale regarding preferences and practicalities was echoed in most of the stories. Tanya referred to wearing the 'badge' of 'feminist' when at University. A big issue then had been that of equal pay, 'but I think there are bigger issues even than that now about roles. Unfortunately I'm not really helping that. I mean nursing is a very female job. And the way we divvy things up ...'.

The sense that participants could feel uncomfortable with having fallen into doing stereotypical female domestic jobs was often apparent – and this was sometimes rebuffed by pointing out certain jobs where this was reversed. Jessica (school business manager) proposed: 'I think I still describe myself as a feminist in the fact that I believe that women are men's equals'. She now saw them as 'different but equal' and went on to try to explain this as follows:

It's not the 'Janet and John thing' – 'it's not like that at all but because I think I do, I put pictures up, I paint rooms, [husband] does cooking. So it's not kind of strict gender roles like that but there's still differences between men and women and I'm not sure if I can actually put my finger on what is different, but they are different, both physically and constructed different.

Gabby (professional support lawyer) was unusual in being both the main breadwinner *and* taking complete responsibility for the home. This was partly due to circumstances in that her husband was now away all week and she was essentially a single mother, but it was clear it predominantly came down to the ructions it had caused when she had tried to get her husband to do more. She described it as a 'bone of contention', but explained:

I was brought up in a household where my father did more than my husband does now. But it didn't really work for us. Whilst sometimes I'd rail against it, and feel that I'm being treated unfairly and all the rest of it, domestic harmony is better preserved if I do everything... So I think I'm a bit of a failed feminist from that point of view.

A number of others also mentioned family harmony as a reason for not sometimes pushing husbands to do more. For example Steph (online consultant) insisted she did not want to be the sort of mother or partner 'that has screaming rows all the time'. Several noted that their husbands would do things if asked (for example, Sara, Cara and Paula), but inferred that they often held back from asking.

The extent to which they valued and respected each other's contribution came into the equation. In Sara's story, for example, the fact that she felt her husband respected her contribution meant that the 'bigger picture' was 'good'. She referred to him 'admiring' her

ability to juggle. If at times they had felt under-appreciated, this was cited as a source of resentment – for example, Karen (sales and marketing consultant) mentioned this had sometimes been the case, and she felt this had been linked to her husband's belief that only paid work was 'proper' work. There were also occasional comments about usually ending up with the 'boring stuff' (Delia), or the stuff that was 'invisible' (Judith).

Steph (online consultant) and her husband were the only couple that had both worked part-time and shared childcare throughout. In terms of domestic work, she commented: 'It's meant to be even. It's meant to be another area of equality'. She talked of how: 'it would be lovely if everything just fell neatly down the middle, and one of you loved doing one thing and the other another thing, but it is not that easy' and that there was 'less resentment when boundaries are clear'. Her core issue was with cleaning where her husband neither noticed it needed doing, nor appreciated it when it had been done. She did not like being resentful but sometimes was - 'I understand my partner's attitude to cleaning. However, it is not tenable for nobody to do it. I don't like cleaning either, but I do see it and I see that it needs doing. So I minded that it came down to me'. Several others also referred to men not being socialised to think cleaning needs doing (for example, Joanna and Sara).

Mostly, if a participant worked longer hours, then her husband tended to help more – when compared to other partnerships as relayed in the stories. Susannah (multi-media consultant) had been the breadwinner until very recently and worked over 30 hours – more or less the same hours as her husband. But her experience of domestic sharing was very different from Gabby's (professional support lawyer), in that her husband had helped out a lot, and continued to do so. When he got home he took over and cooked whilst she went back to work. The three husbands who had stepped back in their jobs in recent years (6.4), had done so from high-earning positions and were still very much the breadwinners: Karen's husband was managing the development and rental of the couple's various properties, which Karen had previously managed on top of her sales consultancy work; Charlotte's was doing consultancy work which was still 40-49 hours but mainly working from home; and Carol's husband had created his own high-level part-time role (half-time), having been HR director for a large multi-national. All three described their husbands as being extremely good at helping at home. Karen's, as noted, had taken over the housework. Charlotte's friends were 'jealous' of her having such a capable, helpful partner. Whilst relative hours did seem to be a factor in how domestic workload was shared, some husbands were helping a lot *and* doing long hours – like Sam's husband (although she was nearly full-time).

This discussion relating to ‘contribution’ has illustrated a complex negotiation of tensions, made more complex by the inter-relation of their ‘contribution’ with their husband’s ‘contribution’ and the fact that this related both to paid work (earnings and time) and unpaid domestic work (time and respect). By constructing the role most have ended up in (secondary earner, with main responsibility for the household) as a *consequence* of their sustained part-time working, they mostly distanced themselves from this being their orientation or ‘choice’.

8.3 A narrative of *reorientation*

This section will explore the narrative of *reorientation*, which emerged across all the stories to some degree. It related to a reorientation away from ‘career’ as ‘progression to senior role’ as the main focus, means of fulfilment and standard for measuring ‘success’ in their working lives. As noted in Chapter 6, only a few women (Sam, Karen, Deb and Delia) claimed *never* to have been ‘career-minded’ and to have always felt that children would be their priority. The majority indicated that their identification with ‘career’ had shifted *since* children – for some immediately, but most suggested this was a process and developed over the years. The narrative of *struggle* apparent to some extent in most stories illustrated that compromise to their jobs did not necessarily come easily and that the focus during this time/space was managing working and caring, rather than ‘career’ development. As the previous section has illustrated, simultaneous to and interconnected to shifting tensions relating to ‘career’, were tensions relating to ‘part-timers’ and to a sense of ‘contribution’. To understand the impact of sustained part-time working on ‘career’ and ‘work’ identities, it is important to take into account how these inter-relate.

Within this narrative, 8.3.1 discusses *reframing standards of ‘good’ working*, which brings together different ways in which participants were reframing fulfilment from work, whilst resisting generally accepted frames of reference regarding career success as ‘progression in status and earnings’, and career commitment as ‘a full-time career focus’. 8.3.2 explores *reframing the meaning of work* within partnerships and life more broadly. The consequence of engaging with a narrative of *reorientation* is a release of tension with ‘career’, ‘part-timers’ and ‘contribution’ and reported positive impact on satisfaction with work and wellbeing overall. However, this also inevitably distances participants from stepping back on the ladder or returning to a full-time ‘career’ focus. The majority engage in *reorientation*, although differ in terms of opportunities, dependent on individual circumstances and opportunities.

8.3.1 Reframing standards of 'good' working

In this chapter so far, a picture has built of how participants were resisting *resumption* to a full-time career, and in doing so, how they were positioning themselves in relation to tensions connected to 'career', 'part-timers' and 'contribution'. Inevitably this has been describing to a certain extent how they have been *reorienting* themselves, or attempting to. I will draw on stories to demonstrate that overall, their identification with 'work' and 'career' shifted over the course of their part-time working. At this stage, particularly with an 'empty nest' looming, whilst they were resisting 'climbing a ladder', 'selling their souls' and 'chasing money', they were now placing more emphasis on seeking fulfilment from work, beyond it simply fitting with caring for children. The stories will indicate that participants were *reframing* standards of 'good' working as: working and contributing per se; work that 'matters' or is 'worthwhile'; work they really enjoyed, had a passion for or found rewarding; work that was varied or interesting to them; work that allowed for self-development or skills development; retaining a sense of control, agency, flexibility or autonomy over their work and hours; doing a 'good' job and being valued for it. As such, participants were *reframing* standards of 'good' working as giving weight to 'work' as a source of fulfilment, rather than 'career'. In these stories told by women who had been educated to expect work to be more than just a job for money, these intrinsic aspects of job satisfaction became increasingly important – as 'career' loss was recognised and career success as 'progression' was resisted.

The next section will recap on Joanna's story (Ch.7) and draw on two further stories (Judith's and Jessica's) to illustrate the different ways in which participants combined reframed standards of 'good' working.

8.3.1.1 Different combinations of reframed standards of 'good' working

Joanna's story (7.2) was chosen as a good illustration of engaging with a narrative of *reorientation*. Whilst clearly being aware of and sensitive to not having progressed ('Joanna three degrees and still just a health visitor'), she was able to *reframe* standards of 'good' working by focusing on aspects of her job that provided fulfilment – the fact that it was enjoyable, varied, worthwhile, rewarding. Her story illustrated her 'othering' of management and full-time working, as part of her justification for holding back and holding onto part-time working. She further illustrated the *reframing* through choosing self-development and variety over increasing hours and/or responsibility in her core role. Her total hours were now 36 (15 health visiting, 15 counselling and 6 doing her Masters), but Joanna emphasised the importance of retaining the control and sense of flexibility her part-time status gave her.

Judith's story provides a compelling example of *reorientation* and the shifting nature of identification with work. Judith was about to give up her job as an occupational therapist (OT) at our first meeting. By the second session she had taken on 'low-level jobs' instead, suggesting she had chosen 'variety' over a job where she had become disillusioned. Not only had she not progressed in the last nine years in the same job, but had found it increasingly hard to put up with lack of fulfilment from the job itself. She had ended up in a 'compromise' physical OT job, after moving west, having originally worked in mental health OT. This was recounted as less important in the context of finding work that fitted with caring for younger children. One of her new jobs was in care work, using some of her OT skills. She was also working front-of-house in a theatre and dog walking, specifically chosen for 'enjoyment'. She described her new jobs as 'rubbishy jobs for money', but also talked of being much happier, and feeling 'free' and invigorated by the 'unpredictability', as in her early working life. She also insisted that working and contributing remained 'hugely important' to her – not least, as a 'role model' for her teenage children. This illustrates how a 'compromise' job in physical OT, which had been acceptable in the context of work that fitted with caring for young children, had become increasingly less so. In choosing to leave OT for several lower-level jobs, she *reframed* her standards of 'good' working to focus on gaining fulfilment from: working and contributing per se; work she enjoyed; work that was varied; a sense of control and freedom; and doing a 'good' job.

Jessica's story also provides a good illustration of a narrative of *reorientation* and the *reframing* of what was important and fulfilling. Pre-children she was an accountant at a 'Big Four' accountancy firm. Post-children she had worked in smaller, local firms and told of both good and bad experiences, dependent on the firm's culture and attitude to flexible and part-time working. A number of factors accumulated, leading Jessica to question the worth of her job: a new boss and shift to a less flexible culture; unsupportive partners who were only interested in their own clients; and 'horrible' clients whom she did not want to help. She spent several years thinking about leaving, but putting it off – 'when [youngest] goes to secondary school, then I will find another job'. But then her mother died, leaving her some money that allowed her to leave her job. Her family were all teachers and social workers, and when she noticed jobs for school finance officers, she felt 'it seemed like the natural thing to go into, because it had some sort of social worthiness'. It was not easy and took 18 months to secure a job, during which time she started retraining as a school business manager. After a rocky start and circumstances that lead to a long commute and at first too few hours (10), then far too many (50), she now worked 24 hours across four school days – on half the rate she was on before. But she insisted that the sense of this job being worthwhile was a better source of satisfaction than status or money:

I feel so much happier, it's worthwhile...at the end of the day, there is a point to what is happening. Everything everybody does in a school is for the children and it's not for their self. It's not puffing themselves up. It's not just about the money.

8.3.2.1 Reframing and supplementation

It was striking that half the participants had taken it upon themselves to supplement their core job, or core role within their job, as a means of achieving fulfilment and/or to add variety to their working life. Doing this, rather than extending their hours further in their core job or taking a step up the ladder, provides particularly strong evidence of *reorientation* regarding 'career' and the *reframing* of standards of 'good' working that become the core measures of fulfilment and achievement.

Joanna was supplementing her core job as a health visitor through self-development (her 2nd Masters degree) and a second specialist role (counselling parent/child relationships). Similarly, Tanya (clinical nurse specialist) had created a specialist dermatology role for herself five years earlier. She had previously experienced difficulties in managing hours that fitted, finding work that was not too tedious, and being seen as inappropriate for senior nursing roles. Her current role enabled her to re-identify with her academic past as a nurse with a biology degree, and she supplemented her core role by writing journal articles, attending conferences and joining committees.

Denise (practice manager, structural engineers) was one of the four participants who originally went back full-time to her work in Heritage Services. She ended up taking a career break after her second child, which extended unexpectedly to five years, after a third child: 'I went from being Head of Department with large budgets, lots of staff, to completely lacking in confidence whatsoever', leading her to take an 'entry level' admin job. She moved to her current job six years ago. Originally just doing 'low level' work, she has developed her role (and hours) to include 'higher level' work, such as writing bids. This was mostly reported as increasing her job satisfaction, although she also felt 'a bit exploited' when she felt she was not given credit for her contribution. Cara (5.2) was drawing on previously acquired management consultancy skills to supplement her role as a student-facing manager in higher education by, for example, getting involved in curriculum development, despite not being an academic. She had also started doing executive coaching privately – in addition to her main job.

Five others had also supplemented their main job with a second job. Carol was doing ad hoc work training relationship counsellors, alongside her job as a school career's advisor. Having headed up a Careers Service, she began an academic career training careers

advisors, but then her husband's job took them abroad. Initially she took a career break to look after her young son, but soon started a consultancy with a friend, counselling expatriate partners on living and working abroad. For nine years, her school careers' job had fitted extremely well with caring for children, but was 'the job I did when I was twenty two'. Recent work with the relationship counselling service, although just a few hours a week, 'slightly puts me outside my normal comfort zone and I quite like that. There's a little kind of frisson of 'hope this works'. I need that in my life'. The school was asking her to up her hours, but she was resisting. She would rather have time to do 'other things', including the relationship counselling work. Steph left her job as a charity campaigner for self-employment six years ago. She described 'cobbling together a living', mainly through online consultancy, which she represented as 'lucrative'. But in going self-employed she had also trained as a coach, and although this was 'no way to make a living', she described this as her 'passion in work' and something she hoped to do more of in the future.

Two women were working on new ventures when we met, on top of their part-time jobs. Paula (previously a TV producer), after seven years in a 'low status' primary school administrative job, explained that the building feelings of frustration prompted her to think about 'what to do with my life'. She had started volunteering for a local community radio station, as the first step in a plan to start one for older people. Whilst still early days: 'it is incalculable, really, the difference it has made to me'. Karen had started a project to launch a social enterprise company, in addition to her work setting up sales deals for a technology company. She was very excited about this new venture, drawing on her skills in networking and helping parents of children in elite sport – something close to her own heart. Her degree was in sports and all three children did sports competitively, one at national level. By our second session, she was working twenty hours a week on this venture, on top of twenty hours for her sales job. Whilst the drive she demonstrated perhaps seemed at odds with her adamantness that 'I was never a career-minded person' and that her 'real goal' had always been to have kids, this was an opportunity to bring parenting into her work. She referred to enjoying 'merging' aspects of her life.

Similar to Karen, Janey had brought an interest from her life outside work (one she shared with her children) into her working life – she was supplementing her part-time work as a vet, which she was rather disenchanted with. Her additional job was as a music teacher in music theory from home and teaching harmonica at her children's primary school. Like the other participants, this was for fulfilment, not for the money.

8.3.2 Reframing the meaning of 'work' within partnerships and life

In this section, I pull together evidence of reframing the meaning of 'work', extending the framing from the individual level to partnership and from working life to life more generally. Much of this has been illustrated during the exploration of tensions earlier in the chapter, and in the stories of Joanna and Sara, but the aim here is to recap in order to illustrate the *reorientation* narrative and use of *reframing*.

8.3.2.1 Reframing 'fairness': moral rationalities of part-time working

'Fairness' and 'justness' were reframed in a number of ways as moral rationalities for sustaining part-time working and thus accepting consequences regarding impact to 'career', gender relations and earnings.

The women in this study invariably concluded that sustained part-time working had impacted negatively on their 'careers'. However, in doing so, they often attached a justification arguing that they had come to believe 'you can't have it all', and that they had 'chosen' part-time, taking on board consequences for their 'career' - rather than full-time, with consequences for their children's wellbeing. Thus accepting 'career' damage was *reframed* as containing a moral rationality, a sense of being morally 'just'. Whilst this reframing was often evident in final reflections and justifications for where they had ended up (for example, 5.2.4, 5.3.4), elsewhere stories tended to contradict the notion of 'choice', referring to part-time as their 'only option' or ending up in part-time when it had not been their original choice (6.2.1). In particular, stories indicated a lack of anticipation of the consequences regarding, for many, the extent of job compromise, and for most, the sustaining of part-time work and scale of impact on their 'careers' (6.2.3; 8.2.3). These contradictions suggest that tensions relating to 'career' were persistently rising up and shifting in different time/spaces, requiring constant *reframing*.

In the discussion on tension relating to 'contribution' (8.2.3), there was evidence of participants *reframing* as 'fair' their usually greater contribution to unpaid domestic work and responsibility for the home, by extending the framing to include overall contribution (paid and unpaid work) relative to their partners. The three-quarters who had ended up as secondary earner, with main responsibility for the home, tended to resist the notion that this was through 'choice' or orientation - positioning it as a *consequence* of part-time working. Thus, the argument went, although it 'could have been the other way round', they 'chose' part-time working, and thus had to accept that it was therefore 'only fair' that they did more at home (8.2.3). Connected to this, was the reframing of 'fairness' between the genders, being constructed in some stories as having shifted from equal opportunities

at work and equal sharing at home to recognising potential differences in preferences, the right to having a 'choice', and the assertion that contributing 'differently' could still be 'fair'. In her final reflections on 'sharing' working and mothering Denise noted: 'I think it actually all comes down to relationships and that you just have to discuss it and almost put that whole issue to one side and just be a human being'.

Section 8.2.3 demonstrated the 'othering' of full-time workers as 'chasing money', and the moral rationality contained within this, particularly when positioned in the context of *dual* high earning which could be portrayed as 'greedy' and 'materialistic'. Participants were shifting their frame of reference from 'fairness' of earnings relative to colleagues, partners and the earnings they could have achieved, to 'fairness' relative to society as a whole. Household income varied significantly and some were very affluent due to their husbands' high earnings (Table 3). However, relatively speaking, *all* could rationalise higher earnings than they currently had as unnecessary.

8.3.2.2 *Shifting priorities in life*

All the stories indicated that a shift regarding priorities in life had occurred over the period of having children and working part-time. Chapters 5 and 6 discussed the narratives of *prioritisation* and *struggle* apparent in the early mothering stories. Four mothers (Sam, Karen, Deb and Delia) claimed to have anticipated prioritising mothering, a few suggested a shifting of priorities during their pregnancy or once they became a mother, or this shift was triggered by crisis moments or an accumulation of episodes where they felt they were not being a 'good' enough mother. The presence of the narrative of *struggle* in many of the stories (6.2.3 and Cara's story in 5.2) highlighted that job compromises were invariably to enable managing working alongside 'being there' for their children, but that they were not *giving up* on their work. A recurring thread has been a lack of anticipation regarding: the extent of compromises (6.2.3), the sustaining of part-time working (6.3.1.1), and the impact these would have on their 'careers' (8.2.3). In the context of reflecting on the largely negative impact on their 'careers', many 'recognised' having prioritised mothering over 'career', despite not necessarily having set out to do so (5.2.4). Concurrently, the stories illustrated the unanticipated need to 'be there' for older children, but also an increasing sense of *reward* from doing so (6.4). From their current perspective, participants tended to appreciate the benefits not just to their children, but also to their own wellbeing, of having 'been there' during the teenage years. They did not want to 'mess up' or 'miss out' on the final years of their children being at home, and they prioritised this over 'career', consistently resisting *resumption* to full-time work (6.4; 8.2). The evidence presented in the preceding analysis chapters indicates that for these women,

there was a *shifting* in priorities – it was a process, and happened over time, rather than it being an informed ‘choice’ or orientation.

Shifting priorities relating to ‘work’ and to the meaning of ‘work’ in relation to ‘life’ per se have also been illustrated (8.3). Having sustained part-time working through the teenage years of their children, a combination of multiple factors seemed to have resulted in a considerable degree of *reorientation* regarding what they considered priorities in life to be. Again, this shifting of priorities was generally portrayed as a *progression*, a growing appreciation over time of other means of fulfilment - from work, as just explored in the section on reframing standards of ‘good’ working (8.3.1), but also from other parts of life, as I will now come on and examine.

Life with teenage children was generally conveyed as less busy for them as part-time working mothers. Fourteen women had increased their working hours at work at some point, but there was still a sense of a growing appreciation of not being overloaded. As Di (tax consultant) put it:

It’s almost a change in mind-set, in that I don’t have to be busy all the time. I think when they’re smaller, and if you’re working, it’s like juggling everything and you’re trying to fit everything in. Now I just seem as if I’ve got a bit more time and I don’t have to fill it. And actually I don’t have to feel guilty either. Sitting and having a cup of tea with a friend on a Friday morning... So I think that, in a way, I’m coming out of that constantly got to be doing stuff and need to be constantly thinking about what other people need and I’m actually able to think about me for a little while.

As Di illustrated, this went beyond simply managing to fit everything in, to *valuing* a sense of space, described elsewhere as ‘mental space’ (Steph), ‘breathing space’ (Jessica) or ‘head space’ (Judith). Other stories echoed Di’s in suggesting their attitude had changed over time - no longer feeling they *had to* fill every spare moment with either work or looking after the family and home, and no longer feeling guilty about taking some time for ‘me’. They also placed a value on having control over time. Steph, for example, referred to actively ‘taking back’ space for herself. Teresa described her Wednesday afternoon as a ‘treasured possession, which regardless of what’s happening with the kids, I don’t want to give up’. She was protecting this time by continuing to resist endeavours to get her to resume full-time hours, proposing that this ‘me time’ made her ‘better at the other two things’ – that is work and caring for her children. Cara talked of the value she placed on having some ‘freedom’ and ‘autonomy’, and nowadays ‘couldn’t stand being constrained by working 9-5’.

In recounting how they spent this time, they mainly referenced time for others or for interests. Four women (Carol, Janey, Gabby and Cara) specifically mentioned needing the time and flexibility for caring for their ageing mothers. Others spoke of time to visit or spend time with parents, time for friends or for their partner. Some had a particular time they kept for seeing a group of close friends – such as Charlotte’s Thursday morning for tennis (she negotiated the flexibility to continue this on going up to full-time hours). Others indicated their enjoyment of being able to meet up spontaneously (for example, Deb). Time for their partner was pointed out, for example by Carol, whose husband also worked part-time (so they could spend time together during the week), and by Gabby, whose husband was away all week (so she protected time at the weekend, by visiting her mother during the week). There were occasional references to relationships suffering when both partners worked full on, suggesting working and parenting were prioritised, with little time or energy left for partnerships (for example, discussed by Steph).

With regards to having time for interests, these were quite often interests the women were re-engaging in: for example, resuming creative writing (Tanya and Cara), badminton (Karen), and French classes (Steph). Others had taken up new activities, such as Gabby who was taking dance classes and entering competitions. A fair number cited time for exercise as important – for example, riding (Janey), running (Sam), and swimming (Deb). These activities were portrayed as ‘good’ for them for enjoyment and/or keeping them fit. They were also construed as symbolically important because they signified a time where they were putting themselves first, a ‘me’ activity (Gabby), and they represented identification with something other than being a mother and a worker. Gabby for example, talked of the increasing importance of having a ‘separate identity’ and Steph described how over recent years, she had begun ‘reclaiming ‘me’’, that she had been ‘worried’ that being a mother and worker were the ‘limit of my identity’.

In the context of mothering and working stories, having time for others and other parts of life was touched on fairly briefly. Nonetheless, it was evident in the continued resistance to full-time working, positioned as a life dominated by work, with little time or energy for much else. It was perhaps most evident in the justifications for retaining part-time in the future, once children had left. It was noticeable that those who had not yet reached the trigger of a child close to leaving (Delia, Susannah, Harriet and Joanna) indicated they were at a stage that was more manageable than it had been with young children, but were less likely to refer to appreciating space for themselves or time for other parts of life.

The picture of shifting priorities in life was consistently conveyed. The preceding discussion indicated that this was not simply about work-life ‘balance’ and resisting a life

dominated by work, with little time for anything else. It went beyond this to incorporating a sense of what having space, time and energy for other things increasingly *meant* to them in relation to their identity and how it extended to values and priorities regarding a 'good' life. The impending empty nest prompted them to question what it was that was important in life. In this context, having time for a cup of tea with a friend or neighbour took on greater significance.

This cumulative sense of shifting priorities in life included the participants' questioning of more money when it was not needed (8.2.3), as one rationale for not resuming a full-time 'career' focus. The growing appreciation of other parts of 'life' and 'me', also fed into the general unsettling of feelings about gender relations. They mostly made sense of their position relative to their partners (three-quarters having become secondary earners with main responsibility for the home) by constructing it as a *consequence* of part-time working, rather than an orientation or choice (8.2.3). Whilst there was some tension around this consequence, there were occasional suggestions that being 'equal' in terms of being the 'same' as men may not be 'the answer'. Indicating a shift in priorities, Susannah noted: 'I don't think it is as simple as me wanting to be the same as my husband any more'. Steph, who had referred to herself as a committed feminist as a teenager, proposed that:

The fundamental questions to me, in all of this, are not about feminism. They are not about equality. I don't know what they are about! I don't know what you'd call it. But it isn't that that I would question. Maybe it is much more about what it is to be human, what the expectations are for a life.

8.4 Looking forward: *disorientation*, *resumption* or continuing *reorientation*?

Many women's stories ended with a repeated justification of why they have not resumed a full-time career, with 'being there' for their teenage children being at the heart of this rationale. Looking forward, the majority proposed that it was unlikely that they would do so; even once their children had left home. However, keeping open a future 'work' or 'career' identity in the context of an 'empty nest', where their 'excuse' (as Joanna put it) for working part-time had disappeared, could create a certain amount of *disorientation*. Those who were nearing this eventuality were more likely to be confronting their future options, but the degree of *disorientation* differed dependent on individual circumstance: - the situation they found themselves in and opportunities for continuing/further *reorientation* or possibly for *resumption*.

Sara's story (7.3) illustrated a *disorientation* narrative fighting with her efforts at *reorientation*. The showed up through her contradictory accounts of whether her 'career'

had been a 'success' or not, her tears of disappointment and frustration in 'recognising' the full impact of sustained part-time working on her 'career', and her questioning of 'what have I done?' moving to freelancing and what this might mean for her future. However, although this narrative was evident in this particular construction of her story, it is likely that feeling 'wobbly' about not having a current work project influenced this. She hinted at being able to conceptualise a *possible* future 'work' identity through *reorientation*. This was either through establishing herself successfully as a freelancer and doing a 'good' job on worthwhile projects, or through changing altogether and perhaps becoming a magistrate, which she thought she could be 'good at' and would find 'rewarding'.

None of the stories were overwhelmed by a *disorientation* narrative and most were engaging with a narrative of *reorientation*. However, inklings of *disorientation* showed up in some women's responses to what they might do in the future time/space of an empty nest. For example, there was a slight sense of panic in the stories of Paula (primary school administrator, previously TV producer) and Denise (practice manager, previously Head of Department in Heritage Services) who had both left full-time careers after their second child, and were working in different, lower status jobs. Paula talked of her 'need to do something creative and achieve something I'm proud of', and that she missed a sense of 'validation, approval, and respect from the outside world'. She was 'dreading' her daughters leaving: 'It's going to be very hard. Oh god. So I need to be doing something by the time they go'. Denise was concerned about her age: 'well I'm getting old, so will anyone still employ me in a full-time capacity at a higher level?' She talked about wavering between feeling confident (and a bit exploited) and unconfident (and accepting of her position as a 'part-timer'). With regards to her decision to go part-time and the impact it had had, she commented: 'I don't have any regrets about any of that. I think I made the right choices at the time with the available information'. However, she went on: 'I feel a little bit more lost now'.

A number of other stories contained notes of fatalism regarding being too old, it being too late, them lacking in confidence and/or opportunity for a renewed focus on a 'career'. Gabby, for example, mentioned her age in reference to whether she could return to fee-paying legal work, also hinting at a lack of confidence in suggesting she might not be 'up to scratch'. Harriet was unsure about her 'employability' after so many years freelancing as a market researcher and veered between 'sticking with what I know for now' and maybe doing something else, perhaps voluntary work. She proposed her sense of not having achieved her potential had increased over recent years. Janey had, like Sara, become extremely emotional as she reminisced about her pre-children career as an equine vet, revealing how much it had meant to her. Giving up her weekday equine work was very

recent and so feelings were likely to be still raw. Looking ahead, she will be 60 by the time her youngest has left, and was 'wondering how I'll feel about my career and my role in life'. She was considering retraining in small animal work, believing this would be 'less old boy', but was concerned how hard it would be to 'catch up'.

Now that Tanya's (clinical nurse specialist) eldest daughter was about to leave for university, she was considering her future. She was concerned about having specialised to such an extent that she was stuck and could not do anything else. She was worried about keeping her job in this financial climate or being 'down-graded': 'I don't think it would have mattered at couple of years ago, but it matters now'. She had worked and fought for this grade, and 'being a band 7 is a bit of a marker, that's the one below wider management'. At conferences, for example, 'how would that look?' if she were a band 6 and those she considered her peers were band 7, 'it would be saying, I'm not really as good as you'. This illustrates the value Tanya placed on her status as a specialist. Whilst she had removed herself from the ladder to management, she had *reframed* fulfilment from work as being achieved through self-development and respect from colleagues as a specialist rather than a manager. Looking forward, however, she could not imagine 'another twenty years of this', after her children had gone. This, together with the fact that potentially being down-graded mattered '*now*', indicated that the success of her reframing up until this point had been linked to her position as a part-time working *mother*. There was a certain amount of *disorientation* associated with imagining trying to retain this level of fulfilment in the context of an empty nest. Although the youngest participant at 44, Tanya proposed that it was 'too late' to change career, certainly for a similar salary.

Susannah's (multi-media consultant, previously broadcast correspondent) storytelling was disrupted more than most by a sense of *disorientation*, although her particular set of circumstances meant this showed up in different ways to those described above. Her boys were only 11 and 13, so she was not yet confronting their leaving. However, a combination of factors appeared to be throwing her story into confusion regarding the meaning of 'work' and 'career' in her life. This included her realisation during the process of participating in this research, that despite the compromises she had made to her 'career', she was not fully benefiting from a part-time status, because she was actually working full-time hours. She identified as 'part-time', and believed others also categorised her as such, because she was mostly there after school. However, of all the participants, she was the only one who still felt her mothering, and enjoyment of mothering were constrained by her working. She indicated she missed out during the evenings and holidays when she had to work, whilst her husband was enjoying time with the boys. She believed working from home made it more difficult to separate her work from home. At

times in her story she railed against the lack of recognition for 'motherhood as a job and a career', and talked about wanting to give up working. She indicated that this desire was fighting with her work which she was 'really, really proud of', but demanded so much of her time and energy: 'it's a lot more difficult to carry on being that successful, when actually what I want to be successful at is raising my children'.

Susannah also talked of going through 'another period of readjustment' regarding no longer being the main breadwinner. She had always felt obliged to continue with her work, but was now beginning to reconsider her options. She made reference to being judged as 'successful' because of her career, and because she was 'super-organised' and a 'machine' which was 'not something to be lauded always as successful'. She concluded this account with: 'If I could have earned a wage by being a mother, I think it would have been easier for me to step out of being a career woman'. Unlike other participants, she still referred to herself as a 'career person'. Her story indicated being caught between the significance of her career and wanting to be able to give it up. She intimated that her working-class background exacerbated this tension by heightening her pride in her success and ingraining in her a strong work ethic. She grappled with her sons not having 'the same pride about me' as their father – 'I'm their support, he's their yardstick', again illustrating her struggle with making sense of what her career meant to her and the shift in her partner becoming 'breadwinner'. Later, she stressed that she did not want to just 'stop and Hoover' but was considering how she could put her skills to use in the community.

The purpose of including Susannah's story in some detail here was in part to highlight the shifting nature of identification with work and career in the story of a woman caught in the middle of a 'period of readjustment'. The story also illustrates how a complex matrix of inter-related tensions regarding working, mothering and gender relations can accumulate into a sense of *disorientation*, despite a strongly stated desire for *reorientation*.

The three-quarters who had ended up in a traditional model of gender relations were able to rationalise this as a consequence of working part-time. But here tended to be a sense of *disorientation* in articulating what they now felt about equality and difference between them and their partners – and what this meant for gender relations in society more broadly. Five women identified as having been feminists in early adulthood and implied that they were clearer then about the aims of gender 'equality', particularly relating to equal pay and opportunities at work. Denise referred to now being 'a bit muddled, to be honest'. Susannah talked of: 'fighting for equal rights – what has it all meant? Pressure and more hats, and giving away the right not to work'. As Sara noted, 'we have not really

got very far, have we? It's still a man's world, I'm afraid'. She admitted she was not sure what she was advocating, but possibly husbands sharing more at home.

Many stories indicated that their 'career' identity had been on hold, if not extinguished, as they stayed put, having (finally) found jobs that fitted with caring for children. As Gabby noted, 'twenty years of trying not to be ambitious sort of kills it'. But there were hints that this might be picked up on or could be re-fired up. Denise stated, alongside justifying still needing to be there for her teenage daughters: 'I am at that point where I do think should I start being more ambitious again and going more for the career option'. Joanna referenced her husband querying why she was 'just' doing a 'job' and not picking up on her 'career', and several others mentioned their husbands questioning their lack of ambition. Charlotte resumed working full-time between our interviews, describing it as an opportunity to 'bloom again'. Others suggested that their children leaving would be a prompt for further *reorientation*, potentially considering 'something new' – for example, Sara (magistrate), Paula (community radio or animated children's films) and Carol (studying).

The door to *resumption* of full-time employment was not entirely closed. But if mentioned, this usually entailed caveats of 'only if it were worthwhile' or particularly rewarding in some way, and suggestions of not having the ambition anymore or feeling there were no longer advantages to doing so. Mostly participants re-stressed their resistance to chasing money and status and being dominated by work, referring to their priorities in life having shifted. This quote from Steph sums up the ambivalence towards sustained part-time working that many suggested in their reflections on where they had ended up and what this meant to them:

The biggest thing when I read your initial email, was just this sense that, it's the thing that I didn't realise, this was what made me want to participate more than anything else, the thing that I hadn't realised, that you step off and you'll never step back on. Yeah (pause), and I kind of mind, but I don't know how I would have done it any differently. It felt right to me. I don't know what the solution would be.

8.5 Conclusion

Overall, the picture that built across the analysis chapters (5-8) was one where tensions relating to expectations regarding caring were releasing as part-time working was sustained, whilst those regarding work and 'career' were building. The first part of this chapter focused on the continued resistance to *resumption* of a full-time career focus, when participants perceived the expectation was to have resumed by now. This showed

how participants were negotiating the consequences of this resistance in relation to inter-related tensions around 'career', 'part-timers' and 'contribution'.

Participants were attempting to make sense of a perceived *lack* of 'career' progression and focus – indicating that this was the expectation of achievement for them as university-educated women. The stories illustrated that this was experienced differently, dependent on the nature of a participant's work, role, and organisational culture, as well as the compromises or changes they had felt compelled to make along the way. However, *all* the participants suggested they had come to recognise that their 'careers' had suffered as a result of their part-time working. This damage was experienced as feeling 'left behind' despite continuing to progress (e.g. Sara), or as 'stuck' on a second track (e.g. Joanna), 'removed' through self-employment (e.g. Harriet) or 'backed into a corner' through specialisation (e.g. Tanya). Key to the construction of their stories was a lack of anticipation regarding the extent of compromises made (often step-by-step), the sustaining of their part-time working, and the ensuing consequences.

Simultaneous to being held back, participants indicated that looking back, they appreciated they had taken part in holding themselves back. This involved them reinforcing perceptual barriers to management (Joanna's story, 7.2). It also related to resisting a negative discourse of 'part-timers', where their stories implied they prioritised doing a 'good' job rather than risking a step up, feeling vulnerable to being seen as lacking in commitment and competence, and feeling a need to 'prove their worth' (Teresa). Using a narrative of *struggle* in early mothering stories had highlighted this emphasis on doing a 'good' job and working hard, positioning themselves as not having *given up* like some 'part-timers'. How they positioned themselves depended on the specific context of their storytelling – for example, stressing how hard they worked (in resisting connotations of 'part-timers') at one point, and then 'othering' full-time workers for overworking (in justifying staying part-time) at another.

Tension in relation to 'contribution' included how the women felt about their contribution in the partnership both to paid and unpaid work. All the participants indicated an obligation to be working and contributing, suggesting they would do regardless of whether this was 'needed' financially. A moral rationality was detected in their positioning themselves as *not* being driven by money, implying that dual high earning was unnecessary and materialistic. Ending up as secondary earner with main responsibility for the home was constructed in the stories as an unintended *consequence* of working part-time, rather than a 'choice' or orientation. Now in this position, they could rationalise doing more of the unpaid domestic work as 'fair' and sticking to the pattern of division of

labour they fallen into as easier for the sake of family harmony. Nonetheless, tension was detected in their stressing that this was neither inevitable nor fixed, and in some discomfort where task division was gender stereotypical.

All the participants engaged to some degree in a narrative of *reorientation* that pointed to the shifting nature of their identification with work and 'career'. The stories illustrated the different ways these women were now *reframing* standards of 'good' working in order to achieve fulfilment from work without 'climbing a ladder' or 'selling their souls' – the accepted frames of reference for 'career' success and commitment they perceived were expected of them, as professional women. As an empty nest began to loom, finding fulfilment from the work itself was recounted as becoming increasingly important. This was now in a context where most suggested they 'recognised' a loss of career identity and ambition. The stories of Joanna, Judith and Jessica illustrated the individual way the women were combining reframed standards of 'good' working, giving more weight to, for example, doing a 'good' job or doing something they found worthwhile. Half the participants were supplementing their core job or role, rather than extending hours or taking a step up in their current job, demonstrating their *reorientation* away from achievement in 'career' to focus more on fulfilment from 'work'.

A narrative of *reorientation* also incorporated the *reframing* of the meaning of work within partnerships and life more broadly. Firstly, this referred to different ways in which 'fairness' was reframed in moral rationalities for sustaining part-time working. For example, accepting 'career' damage could be reframed as containing a moral rationality, by suggesting this was rather than accepting the potential consequences of full-time working for children's wellbeing. There was a sense of a shifting in priorities across the stories, reinforcing the narrative of *reorientation*. As well as the shift in priorities regarding career and work, the majority indicated that looking back, they felt they had ended up prioritising children over career, albeit this had not always been anticipated and had been a progression. Staying part-time had resulted in unanticipated *rewards* with regards to their mothering. These inter-related shifts also opened up a further growing appreciation of fulfilment from other parts of life, valuing the sense of 'space' they were experiencing in their current time/space of part-time working with teenage children, and time for relationships and interests. This went beyond simply work-life 'balance' to include what having the space, time and energy for other things increasingly meant to them in relation to their identity and to values and priorities regarding a 'good' life.

Looking forward, the majority maintained that *resumption* of a full-time career focus was unlikely. However, a certain amount of *disorientation* was detected in many of the stories.

This differed dependent on the situation they found themselves in regarding experiences of compromise and/or opportunity for further *reorientation* or possibly *resumption*. For most this was a quieter voice in the storytelling compared to that of reorientation, but could rise up when considering the future, particularly if they had a child who had already left or was about to. Sara and Susannah's stories were disrupted more than most by a sense of *disorientation* as they tried to make sense of their particular experiences. For others, there were hints of panic where they felt their jobs had been particularly compromised (e.g. Paula and Denise, both working in different, lower level jobs). Disorientation could take the form of feeling it was 'too late' for change, or that their age might be an issue, or they were lacking in confidence and/or opportunity for a renewed focus on 'career'. Whilst the majority continued to resist resumption of a full-time career focus, by insisting they would not need more money than they earned now, or that they could not see any advantage to doing this now, this could often be contradicted with suggestions that maybe they would if they found something they really enjoyed or found worthwhile. This left open the opportunity for re-engaging with 'career' in the future, but final reflections also often restated the shift in their priorities in life.

Chapter 9

Discussion

9.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to understand the potential impact of sustained part-time working on women's identities with regards to motherhood and work. The first objective was to document mothers of older children's accounts of experiences of sustained part-time working and mothering. This was achieved through generating life stories relating to working and mothering with twenty women who had predominantly worked part-time since their children were young and were now at the life-stage where their youngest child was at secondary school (see Ch.4). The second objective was to analyse how these experiences of sustained part-time working and mothering might impact on worker and mother identities. Findings relating to experiences of mothering (as a part-time worker) were outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 and those relating to sustained part-time working (as a mother) in Chapters 7 and 8.

The first part of this chapter (9.2) focuses on the third objective, which was to theorise how the women were constructing their worker and mother identities, and discusses the findings in relation to theorising on worker-mother identity construction found in the literature. In doing so, it engages with feminist debates regarding combining work and motherhood. It examines the problematic and contested notion of 'choice' and orientation (9.2.1), the ways in which 'choice' is complicated (9.2.2) and implications for theorising how participants construct and negotiate mother/worker identities (9.2.3). A key finding is that for these women 'becoming' a part-time working mother was neither an informed 'choice', nor fixed orientation, but an on-going process of moral negotiation within a matrix of inter-related, shifting and interacting tensions. This opens up the opportunity for change.

The second part of this chapter (9.3) turns to the impacts of sustained part-time working on the mother and worker identities of these women. This particular life-stage perspective on combining part-time working and mothering fills a gap in the literature and this section discusses the findings in relation to the various related strands, including for example parenting adolescents and 'work-life balance'. Overall, the findings support the indications in the literature that sustained part-time working, in its current form, is unlikely to get more women into 'top' jobs (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005), nor unsettle uneven gender relations in managing work and family (Walby, 2007). However, in considering how to take up the opportunity for change and the direction this should

take, the positive impacts these findings suggest need to be taken into account, as well as the negative impacts.

The final section (9.4) turns to the implications of these findings for feminist debates, in terms of the direction of change, illustrating this through some initial suggestions for implementation. Limitations of this research are also heeded, together with questions arising from it, in considering future research.

9.2 'Becoming' a part-time working mother – an on-going process of negotiation

Hakim's (2004) highly contested work-life 'choices' have been at the heart of feminist debates relating to work and motherhood (Gornick and Meyers, 2003), and inter-linked debates regarding the individualist, neo-liberal 'adult-worker' model, taking the place of the 'breadwinner' model in assumptions regarding policy making. Despite being much critiqued, Hakim's work has been influential in sparking debate, since it attempts to operationalise a theory of individualisation. Whilst much discussed in relation to late or post-modernity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, Giddens, 1991), individualisation theories have often been criticised for being too abstract (Duncan et al, 2003). As described in Chapter 1 (for example, 1.4.2), within the sociology of family and relationships, there are debates regarding the extent of the suggested shift from highly gendered roles and deeply felt obligations to negotiated, individualised interactions (Gillies, 2003). This is important, since much of the family policy debate derives from different interpretations of the implications of individualisation – on the one hand, disintegration of family ties and morals, or on the other, democratisation and diversity. Similarly, individualisation is core to theorising in the sociology of work (see 2.2.1) where there are positive and negative interpretations of the implications of individualisation colliding with discourses of flexibility and consumption (Gabriel, 2005).

Thus, although it has been much critiqued, Hakim's (2004) Preference Theory is a useful reference point as it ties into these broader debates. The findings from this study add to the critique. They provide further evidence of decisions being contingent on 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999), refuting Hakim's proposal that women are making free 'choices' regarding work-home status. They add weight to hints in the literature that these 'choices' are initially tenuous (Vincent et al., 2004) and indicate these 'choices' are uninformed. They provide evidence to question Hakim's categorisation of 'adaptives', regarding her suggestion that part-time work is chosen due to a *weaker* commitment to work. 'Orientation' is shown to alter in different time/spaces (McDowell et al, 2005), rather than being fixed at an early stage as Hakim (2004) contended. It is

complicated by the women repeatedly 'choosing' and rationalising part-time work, entrenching themselves in part-time working and increasingly taking part in distancing themselves from full-time working 'career' mothers. In the following sections, 'choice' will be discussed in relation to this critique of Hakim (2004) and the literature drawn on in Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

9.2.1 'Choice' and orientation

Vincent et al (2004) referred to initial settlements as 'tenuous' and 'nebulous' and McDowell et al (2005) to decisions as neither 'clear-cut' nor 'constant'. Authors suggest that 'career' identity appears to be 'on hold' during the early stages of motherhood, whilst mothers are grappling with their new identity as a mother (Bailey, 2000, Johnson and Swanson, 2007, Vincent et al., 2004). Garey (1999) indicated that for women with younger children, the 'plan' regarding working hours and status remains 'quite vague', with many part-time working mothers suggesting they would increase their hours once their children were 'older'. This research concurs with this literature regarding the apparent state of upheaval and uncertainty in which women were making their 'choices'. Many mothers intimated they were taken aback by the shock of how they felt about becoming a mother, the sense of responsibility and need to 'be there' for their child (see also Lupton, 2000, Miller, 2005). Several delayed their return to work or felt their return was 'too early', and some suggested they only decided to go part-time whilst on maternity leave. The stories often indicated a lack of planning and/or anticipation regarding the practicalities of managing working and caring for their new baby.

The argument that going part-time was not an informed 'choice' refers to the emphasis given in the story construction to the unexpected way in which events unfolded. For many, the lack of anticipation related to the extent of job compromises made, often step-by-step and in response to crises in managing work and childcare or shifting childcare needs, and the consequences set in motion. This was well illustrated through Cara's story (5.2) and her use of a narrative of *struggle*. Four participants had not intended to go part-time, and only did so after a second child (see also Houston and Marks, 2003) or in the case of Carol, a move abroad for her husband's job. The sustaining of part-time working was recounted as unexpected (see also Garey, 1999), with all participants suggesting still feeling the need to 'be there' for teenagers was unanticipated (6.3.1). Also reported as unforeseen was their being stuck in the same jobs and/or at the same level for many years, their subsequent reorientation away from a 'career' focus and for three-quarters, ending up as the secondary earner in a 'traditional' partnership (Ch.8). If 'choice' is tenuous and uninformed, this clearly questions the notion of 'choice'. This is significant, bearing in

mind the consequences in terms of entrenchment and loss of 'career' of this initial decision. However, appreciating that 'choice' is uninformed opens up the opportunity for change.

Hays (1996: p.131) contended that if you were a mother, you had to be an 'intensive' one and 'the only 'choice' involved' was whether to 'add' the role of paid worker. The storytelling in this research illustrated adherence to 'intensive mothering', regarding the women's need to 'be there' *themselves* to care for their children (6.2). However, this was together with assuming they would continue in and retain a strong commitment to work. The picture painted in these women's stories was being caught between two powerful and competing obligations to mothering *and* paid work. This resonates with studies that have suggested this was the norm for the generation of women becoming mothers after second wave feminism (see Blair-Lay, 2001, Everingham et al., 2007). There was little reference to considering staying at home, and the stories were oriented towards justifying why they had not resumed full-time paid employment by now. Many indicated they still 'needed' to work. This was relative and socially constructed (see also Johnston and Swanson, 2007). Stopping work on becoming a mother would have meant losing a significant proportion of household income (all but two were earning at least half, with one-third earning more than half). But the participants also conveyed a strong sense that they *should* be working, to contribute to their household and to be a working person. Some specifically linked this to their education (6.2.1), being educated to have a 'career' (see also Rose, 2005), and as a university-educated woman, having the responsibility and opportunities to do so. Many also referenced stay-at-home mothering as 'boring' and 'un-stimulating' (see also Vincent et al. 2004), with occasional reframing of time away as improving their patience and thus good for their children (see also Johnston and Swanson, 2006). This was found in stories of those identifying as maternal (e.g. Sam in 5.3.2), as well as those who did not (6.2.2).

The stories were imbued with notions of 'being there' being the 'right thing to do'. This was inherent in the construction of both the narratives of *struggle* and *prioritisation* and in how the women positioned themselves compared to full-time working mothers. This is consistent with Duncan and Edwards' (1999, 2003) contention that women's employment decisions are made in relation to responsibilities to children, and are thus gendered, *moral* rationalities. The core rationality for working part-time was consistently that they needed to 'be there' some of the time, for the sake of their children (see also Hays, 1996, May, 2008, Miller, 2005). This was not always rationalised at the point in the story when they went part-time, since this could be assumed (see next paragraph), but it was there in every story. The sense of moral responsibility was emphasised over a 'natural' instinct to mother for many and through, for example, concerns voiced about full-time childcare, and

their sense of guilt when not 'there' 'enough' or when their child expected them to be (see also Johnston and Swanson, 2006). These moral rationalities appeared to override economic rationalities in decision-making (see also Duncan et al., 2003, Williams, 2004). As significant contributors to household income, in professional jobs, their decision to go part-time was not consistent with an individualistic, cost-benefit type decision regarding maximising personal gain. The same argument applies in relation to new household economics and maximising human capital (Becker, 1999, given some support by Hakim, 2004), since in their position, they could have paid for childcare.

Literature is consistent in emphasizing the deeply *gendered* nature of 'intensive mothering' ideology (Hays, 1996, May, 2008, Miller, 2005), and this research concurs, regarding the clear sense of responsibility the participants had, as mothers, to care for their children. There was little rationalising why it was they rather than their partners going part-time. This absence of rationale is in keeping with part-time working being a socially acceptable, gendered 'norm' for mothers of young children in the UK (see also Smithson and Stokoe, 2005) and thus not requiring an explanation (see also Frank, 2010, Miller, 2005). This is in contrast to Hochschild's (1997) study, where in the US context part-time working was still unusual and difficult to take up practically and ideologically for women in professional jobs. Any comments relating to partners usually suggested that going part-time would have been more difficult or not feasible for them in their workplaces, as men (see also Smithson, 2005). The two men that did go part-time from the start (Steph and Joanna's husbands) did so due to political beliefs about gender equality and sharing. This resonates with Duncan et al.'s (2003) findings that *equal* allocation of family work was only found to occur where driven by political belief. The men's particular jobs also made this easier (highly feminised culture of social work and flexibility of freelance graphic design).

Early mothering literature indicates the interweaving of an essentialist discourse of 'natural' mothering into 'intensive mothering' ideology (Lupton, 2000, Miller, 2005). Four mothers specifically positioned themselves as 'maternal' (6.2.2); that they had always wanted children and that *prioritising* mothering had been anticipated and was positioned as a 'natural' instinct. However, a greater number referred to themselves as *not* being a 'maternal' type (6.2.2) which could be linked to not having wanted children or been interested in having them beforehand (e.g. Teresa), to poor relationships with their own mother (e.g. Steph), or to not being good at dealing with toddlers (e.g. Judith) or playing with young children (e.g. Sara). By positioning themselves as *not* being maternal, they were emphasising a sense of *moral responsibility* driving their 'need' to 'be there', which though gendered, was not, according to their stories, essentialist. It may be that voicing

suggestions of lacking maternal instinct and experiencing difficulties coping with young children was easier from their perspective of looking back from some distance. Miller (2005) found in her longitudinal research that some new mothers contradicted earlier narratives of coping, indicating these had been embellished initially under the intense expectation for this 'natural' maternal instinct. The majority in this research also stressed that their part-time working was driven by a sense of responsibility towards their *children*, with little suggestion that it was considered the 'right thing to do' as the wife in their partnership (see introduction to 9.3).

Importantly, the findings pointed to these professional women taking up part-time employment *despite* a strong commitment to work and for the majority, certainly initially, to 'career'. This is in contrast to Hakim's (2004) proposal that those 'choosing' part-time do so out of a weaker commitment to work. Their commitment was evident through the construction of the stories of working and identifying how the participants were managing tensions and positioning themselves. A narrative of *struggle* (dominant in seven stories and a strong thread in all but four) emphasised that these women had not *given up* on work and 'career' during the early phase of mothering (6.2.3). Tension relating to early mothering was *neutralised* or counter-balanced to some extent by re-adjusting work arrangements. However, modifications tended to be represented as unanticipated and unintended compromises that could be difficult to accept. This indicated that 'career' expectations had not been adjusted (at this stage), but rather were 'on hold'. Of the six women who are now working significantly below the level they were at prior to children (see Table 1), only one took this step immediately (Janey selling her veterinary practice).

Commitment to work and not having *given up* on it was also shown up in participants' resistance to a discourse of 'part-timers' (8.2.2), illustrated across the stories, including the four constructed as *prioritising* children over career from the start. For example, examining tension relating to 'part-timers' in the stories indicated an emphasis on doing a 'good' job, in part to compensate for the expected perception of them as lacking in commitment and competence (see also Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). There was also some 'othering' of 'part-timers' who had 'given up' or 'sold out' (e.g. Susannah), accompanied by a careful positioning of themselves as working hard and efficiently – even arguing that working shorter hours made them more productive (e.g. Teresa), similarly identified by Edwards and Robinson (2001). The stories implied that a moral responsibility to their employer to do a 'good' job tended to override 'career' or personal ambition. If they experienced crises and overspill, they adjusted their job or hours so that they *could* do a 'good' job (e.g. Cara 5.2). This sense of obligation to their employer was also referenced in terms of feeling 'lucky' or 'grateful' to employers for 'allowing' them to work part-time

(8.2.2). This resonates with Kelliher and Anderson (2010) who found flexible workers ended up working more intensively, partly due to a sense of indebtedness. Whilst the majority of stories led to a narrative of *reorientation* away from 'career', this again indicated that these women had not just *given up*, but went to extraordinary lengths to achieve fulfilment from work in other ways – once they appreciated the position they found themselves in regarding perceived damage to their 'career'. The findings pointed, however, to the appreciation of loss of career only coming later (picked up in 9.3.2).

So far, my argument has highlighted the fact that decisions were tenuous and uninformed, undermining the notion of 'choice'. It has proposed that these university-educated women were caught between obligations to care for their children *and* to work, and their 'choices' were contingent on gendered moral responsibilities to their children. Importantly, they 'chose' part-time despite a strong commitment to work and for many, to 'career'. The discussion will now turn to ways the notion of 'choice' was complicated in the storytelling.

9.2.2 Complicating the notion of 'choice'

There was ambivalence and seeming contradiction in the stories regarding 'choice'. Mostly stories suggested 'choice' was directed, as discussed above, that the women felt conducted to act in a certain way. However, the storytelling sometimes included references to, for example, them *wanting* to be there or full-time workers missing out, the justifications inferring that 'being there' was not just about children's welfare and care and included a hint of preference. There were also occasional remarks suggesting they *did* have other 'choices'. Taking a dialogic perspective (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986, Frank, 2010) illustrates that 'choice' was *highly context specific* in their sense-making, requiring an appreciation of the conditions of 'heteroglossia' (3.2.1) and the *nub of any struggle* in the dialogue at that specific time/space in the story. This was shown up in contradictions, illustrating inter-related competing pulls. For example, when trying to make sense of loss of 'career', a participant could suggest they 'chose' to prioritise children, rather than working full-time and 'chasing money' – whereas elsewhere argue they had 'no option' but to work part-time (e.g. Gabby). Or in the context of comparing their position to single mothers and/or those on lower household incomes, they could refer to having had 'choices' (e.g. Steph), but elsewhere seemingly contradict this, by stressing the constraints to their 'choices'. Or when trying to make sense of becoming secondary earner/primary homemaker, they could position 'being there' for their children as a *personal* preference, but that it could have been the other way round – as a means of resisting being perceived as oriented towards 'traditional' gender relations (e.g. Jessica).

The *work* of the stories indicated the women were undertaking a *series* of negotiations, in constantly shifting circumstances (see also McDowell et al., 2005). The life stories chronicled the changing childcare needs at critical junctures (6.2.2), requiring readjustments in work arrangements (see also Houston and Marks, 2005), and a reassessment of what constituted 'good' mothering with teenagers (see also Elvin-Novak and Thomsson, 2001), with a shift to part-time working *enabling* 'good' mothering. The four stories told in detail (Ch.5&7) demonstrated how stories took into account the individual experiences of part-time working (compromises and difficulties, the extent to which they became 'stuck', opportunities for reorientation) that influenced the conditions of each successive negotiation. Circumstances had also shifted in their partnerships, for example, with changes in partners' jobs and for most, a gradual move to being secondary earner. Looking forward, participants were well aware of the critical juncture they were approaching in the form of their children leaving, and that this would instigate another reassessment of their 'choices', in different circumstances. This notion of repeatedly 'choosing' and negotiating, within shifting circumstances and ebbing and flowing tensions, resonates with Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) conceptualisation of repeatedly 'becoming'.

The notion of 'choice' was also complicated in the sense making relating to the women's entrenchment in part-time working. On the one hand, the stories were constructed to stress a set of consequences that were unintentional and unavoidable. This was particularly where a narrative of *struggle* was used, but even the minority who engaged strongly with a narrative of *prioritisation* indicated that the *sustaining* of part-time working and extent of the impact on their 'careers' was unanticipated. On the other hand, the stories also represented them holding themselves back and being complicit in this. This was apparent in the 'othering' of full-time working and more senior levels, where they were shutting down 'options'. This can be understood through appreciating their internalisation of 'part-timer' and simultaneously their resistance to this, and similarly to notions of 'career' once they began to feel pressure to return full-time and tensions started to rise regarding lack of progression. This illustrates Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualisation of negotiation of tensions involving simultaneous resistance and coherence in relation to discourses.

Subsequently, the stories also implied that participants were taking part in their *reorientation* away from 'career' to find fulfilment from work through *reframing* standards of 'good' working and the meaning of work within life (8.3.1). However, the conditions in which they were making these 'choices' had by now shifted significantly, and tended to take into account perceived diminishing benefits of resuming a 'career' focus. Over the course of the stories there was a sense of shifting priorities and growing appreciation of

not being overloaded and having time for relationships and interests (8.3.2), and that staying part-time was beneficial to them as mothers as well as for their children (6.4). The stories indicated a greater sense of agency in continuing to 'choose' part-time working during this later time/space of mothering teenagers, particularly when following the 'success' stories of mothering. Simultaneously, the stories illustrated unanticipated entrenchment in part-time working and unintentional 'loss' of 'career', with many suggesting that resuming a 'career' focus was no longer a viable option. Overall, the stories point to the complexity and fluidity of mother-worker identity construction. The decision to go part-time initially was a decision made at one point in time, with varying consequences, but in all cases, the negotiation regarding the mother-worker identities has been on-going, rather than a one-off 'choice' or fixed orientation as Hakim (2004) proposed.

9.2.3 Theorising construction and negotiation of mother/worker identities

The implications from this research for theorising how women were constructing and negotiating mother/worker identities broadly concur with Duncan et al.'s (2003) theorising, in terms of favouring 'moral negotiation' over theories of individualisation (such as Hakim, 2004) or new household economics (Becker, 1981) in explaining empirical findings relating to 'mothers' value systems' (Duncan et al., 2003: p.323). According to Duncan et al., (2003: p.326), this theorising indicates an element of agency in taking part in 'negotiation', where the 'right thing to do' is shifting and no longer ascribed, but in contrast to theories of individualisation, there is more emphasis on the 'social negotiation of identities and moralities'. Duncan et al. (2003) were referring to a theoretical strand emanating from sociological research on the family, but this research has found that this would also resonate with stories of negotiating worker and career identities.

A dialogic perspective places an emphasis on morality, through Bakhtin's (1986) conceptualisation of a liminal self/other identity (3.3.1). A dialogic lens adds considerable weight to the *context* and *matrix* of inter-related and shifting discourses, experiences and ideology which require negotiating, and has been described as providing a 'thick' social/relational lens, together with a 'thin' individual one (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). In this research, applying a dialogic lens and paying attention to the *work* of the stories and narratives drawn on, has illustrated a nuanced and complex negotiation of multiple, shifting discourses and *tensions* – allowing room for agency, but within conditions where participants were conducted to feel and act in particular ways. 'Letting stories breathe' (Frank, 2010) where possible (Ch.5&7), rather than fragmenting them through themes,

has illuminated this complex negotiation, and the *fluidity* of identity construction as conditions change and identities are negotiated from different perspectives. A focus on *tensions* and how these are negotiated, rather than dominant themes (can be one and the same e.g. tension regarding 'career'), has included 'quieter' voices (Frank, 2005), which were also shown to be significant in sense-making, for example with respect to tension around 'contribution' (8.2.3). It has also highlighted gaps between experiences and expectations. For example, inherent to the narrative of *struggle* was the dissatisfaction with attempting to *neutralise* tensions in early motherhood that was linked to lack of anticipation about the extent and sustaining of compromises to job and 'career'.

Appreciating the fluidity of identity construction and shifting circumstances and tensions, ebbing and flowing and interacting, guards against 'categorising' the storytellers at one point in time or space (Frank, 2010). This was what Hakim (2004) did in proposing that 'orientations' were fixed early on. This was also true in Johnston and Swanson's (2007) application of dialectical theory to mothers of pre-school children (3.2). Duncan and Edwards (1999, 2003) similarly 'categorised' women in their analysis, and although useful in showing up distinctions between different groups of women, they have been critiqued for not appreciating shifting circumstances (McDowell et al., 2001). From a dialogic perspective, it is through shifting conditions and intersecting discourses in different time/spaces that opportunities for agency arise.

Duncan et al. (2003: p.326) questioned the applicability of 'moral negotiation' in terms of accounting for 'social prescription' (the power of mothering ideology in prescribing the 'right thing to do') and 'non-negotiation' (some women taking up a 'pre-given' division of labour, rather than negotiating with partners). Applying dialogical narrative analysis and paying attention to tensions illustrated that, even where centripetal forces of structure were powerfully conducting participants to cohere, these were in dynamic tension with centrifugal forces of agency seeking to resist (see also Bakhtin, 1981, Gardiner and Bell, 1998, Holquist, 1990). Hence, although early mothering stories were imbued with needing to 'be there' for their children in order to be a 'good' mother, moral negotiation was occasionally apparent in their *reframing* of some time away from their young children as making them more patient, and thus being better for the children (6.2.3). The four women primarily following a narrative of *prioritisation* reported accepting from the start that working part-time would involve taking on a greater responsibility at home. Appreciating the nub of tensions relating to 'contribution' (8.2.3) illustrated that this was in the context of being considered 'only fair' in terms of overall contribution, and as a consequence of them being at home more. Again, this illustrated an element of moral negotiation going on, behind the apparent 'non-negotiation' with their partners.

Academics (Burkitt, 1998, Fraser, 2013) have noted similarities between Bakhtin and Bourdieu in attempts to account for structure *and* agency, and their more practical, embodied approach to language in comparison to structuralists and post-structuralists. Burkitt (1998: p.165) took Bakhtin's conceptualisation of 'speech genres' and how people absorb and master the different 'speech genres' they brush up against in their day-to-day lives, and traced the resonances with Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'field' (see 3.3.1). Frank (2010: p.52) included the notion of 'narrative habitus' in his 'socio-narratology', referring to the 'embedding of stories in bodies', the way individuals develop a competence to use, and a disposition towards, a repertoire of recognisable, shared stories (see 3.3.3). This theorising makes sense of the relatively few, shared narratives (see also Frank, 2010, Miller, 2005, Somers, 1994) identified as being used to frame the individual stories – *struggle*, *prioritisation* and *enabling* for the stories of mothering, and *resumption*, *reorientation* and *disorientation* for the stories of sustained part-time working. However, by appreciating how individuals are not tied to one narrative but tend to move between them, how new narratives become available in different time/spaces (for example, *enabling* for part-time working mothers of teenagers), and how acknowledging a narrative does not preclude resisting it (as with *resumption*), opportunities for agency and individuality are made apparent – even if only slight or occasional.

Duncan (2005), in exploring 'gendered moral rationalities' with a focus on class, had pointed to Bourdieu in potentially making sense of distinctions found within and between groups of middle-class and working-class women, having dismissed Hakim's classless preference theory and Goldthorpe's class-based rational action theory (see 1.4.2). He suggested, however, that although Bourdieu was interested in distinctions between middle-classes, the application of his concepts has mostly focused on the middle-class's accumulation of 'capital' compared to working classes. Again, by focusing on *tensions*, and the *context* and nub of the *struggle*, this has brought to light hints of resistance in some stories in relation to participants' position of privilege. For example, the positioning of full-time working mothers in dual-high-earning couples as 'materialistic' (8.2.1) and the 'othering' of mothers who were positioned as 'overly pushy', sometimes linking this to stay-at-home mothers (6.3.2.4). Perrier (2012) similarly reported the ambivalence of middle-class mothers of pre-schoolers towards encouraging educational success and their distancing themselves from 'pushy', strategic mothers. This led her to critique the emphasis on accumulation in applying Bourdieu's concept of 'capital', arguing this could miss the presence of contradictions in maternal moralities and noting Reay's (2000) contention that academic achievement can have an emotional cost, even for middle-class children. This resonates with the findings from this research. A focus on tensions in the

stories also signalled where gender and class privilege could be in tension in uncomfortable intersections – in particular, some participants showing their confusion regarding their complicity in uneven gender relations, but simultaneously, resisting the notion of dual-high-earning (potentially the outcome had both partners focused on and progressed in professional careers) as preferable (8.2.3).

Conceptualising the mother-worker identities as a *dialectic* relationship suggests a both/and relationship (Baxter, 1990), which chimes with the findings in this research. Drawing out the stories of mothering and stories of working separately, but allowing the stories to ‘breathe’ (Frank, 2010) illustrated that the mother and worker identities were both separate and simultaneously interconnected and interacting. This avoids simply presenting mother and worker identities as dichotomous, aiding academics looking for ways out of the stalemate of ‘mother’ and ‘worker’ being perceived as purely in opposition and conflict with each other (see for example, Johnston and Swanson, 2007, Duncan et al., 2003). It also avoids many women being perceived as simply ‘in-between’ on a dualistic spectrum, indicating a weaker commitment than ‘ideal’ mothers and ‘careerists’, also a suggestion feminists have taken issue with (e.g. Houston and Marks, 2005). Nolan (2009) pointed to Hakim’s ‘adaptive’ positioning as meaningful but unhelpful. A dialectic conceptualisation has provided a more nuanced appreciation of *how* women were identifying with mother and worker identities. The notion of ‘weaving’ has been used to describe the negotiation of mother and worker identities (Bailey, 2000, Garey, 1999). This resonates with these findings, in the way ‘weaving’ suggests a fluidity or movement to the negotiation (as opposed to being static or fixed) and a sense of separate, but overlapping, entwined threads. But it underplays the sense of competing multiple pulls and misses the intersection and interaction of the identities, and dynamic tension apparent in the negotiation in this research. Applying dialogic dialectical theory (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996), has enabled an appreciation of *how* women were managing the tensions in and between the identities, distinguishing between *neutralising* and *reframing* in the mothering stories (the former being found to be less satisfying as per Baxter, 1990, and Johnston and Swanson, 2007), and drawing attention to the different ways of *reframing* found in the stories of working.

Before moving on, it is worth reiterating the key finding that ‘becoming’ a part-time mother was neither a free nor informed ‘choice’, nor fixed orientation, but rather an on-going process of negotiation, within a matrix of inter-related, constantly shifting and interacting tensions. This opens up the opportunity for change. In order to explore the direction these changes might take, the discussion will now turn to the impact of sustained part-time working on mother and worker identities.

9.3 Impacts of sustained part-time working on mother and worker identities

I will now turn to the key findings regarding experiences of *sustained* part-time working and the impacts on mother (9.3.1) and worker (9.3.2) identities, discussing how these part-time working mothers of older children made sense of where they had ended up through their stories of mothering and working. First, consideration will be paid to impacts of sustained part-time working on gender equality, which were largely negative both at work and at home. As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, it was indications in the literature that this was likely to be so, that drove an interest in understanding how and why university-educated, professional women might sustain part-time working.

In the work-place, part-time working has been linked with a 'hidden brain drain' (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005), perpetuating the gender pay gap and limiting women's ability to get 'top' jobs (Lewis, 2008) thereby contributing to gender inequality (Walby, 2007). Whilst this research does not seek or claim to be representative, from the outset, in the course of recruiting the participants (see Table 5), it was apparent that almost half were working below their pre-children level, over a decade and for many nearing two decades previously, and only a small minority had progressed slightly/slowly since then. The stories in this research bring to life the picture of entrenchment, lack of progress and working below potential suggested by organisational literature on part-time working (Connolly and Gregory, 2010, Jenkins, 2004, Grant et al, 2005). Despite mostly being established in professional jobs at the time of going part-time, these were predominantly stories of marginalisation and often under-utilisation. The majority started out in 'good' part-time jobs (Tilly, 1996), negotiated with their previous employer. Shorter term, for some, this fitted with those who argue (see Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003) that marginalisation is less pronounced in professional/managerial positions, since employees can achieve pro-rated pay, training opportunities and access to intrinsically satisfying work, thereby maintaining professional work whilst also spending some time caring for children. However, working part-time was more difficult for some from the start, as illustrated through the use of the narrative of *struggle*, where participants were likely to be working in demanding organisations that made minimal effort to adapt for part-time working (see also Edwards and Robinson, 2001). They also felt the need to work extra hard to make up for perceptions of lacking commitment and being less than 'ideal', so were not always achieving the flexibility and time for caring they had gone part-time for (see also Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010). The stories indicated that careers were 'on hold' (the majority) or accepted as secondary (the four leading with a *prioritisation* narrative) during the early stages, rather than considering their part-time working as flexible,

'boundaryless' careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), a further argument used in the more positive depiction of working part-time at a higher level (Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003).

Many participants went on to make step-by-step compromises to their jobs, with stories characterised by juggling and unanticipated readjustments as childcare needs altered. This was well illustrated by Cara's story (5.2). Of the twenty participants, three stepped back immediately (two to self-employment, one selling their practice), and a further eleven went on to step backwards or compromise their jobs in some way, over and above going to part-time hours, and/or adjusted their hours further (see table 5). Importantly, by *sustaining* part-time work, participants ended up getting 'stuck' (and/or holding themselves back) or discriminated against (made to feel less than 'ideal' or 'left behind'). This concurs with those on the other side of the debate, who argue that there are costs to part-time working at a higher level and professional part-time workers can still be treated unequally (Connolly and Gregory, 2009, Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003, Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010). This was true if the women took, or were side-tracked into, a second 'track' as per Joanna in health visiting (7.2), resonating with a 'mommy track' as discussed in US literature (e.g. Hochschild, 2000), but distinguished by a UK context where it is easier to go part-time (normalised and socially acceptable for mothers of young children), although there was a lack of awareness of longer-term consequences. But it was also true of those who tried to keep going 'against the odds', as vividly illustrated by Sara's story in TV production (7.3), or 'removed' through self-employment, or 'backed into a corner' through specialisation. This was particularly the case for those who had changed jobs and moved down (see also Connolly and Gregory, 2008). The stories help explain how women become entrenched and how they can become complicit in this, as well as how the majority turn away from 'career' to alternative means of fulfilment from work (picked up in 9.3.2). An internalisation of negative perceptions of 'part-timers' played a key part (see also Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). For these women, sustained part-time working has meant the gap has widened over time between where they could have got to career-wise and where they have ended up, contributing to gender inequality with their male colleagues, as well as their partners. However, as discussed (9.2.1), the stories indicated a strong commitment to work for the vast majority and certainly initially, to 'career', implying their relative lack of progression to top jobs was not simply due to orientation or 'choice'. The findings also highlighted a significant lack of planning and anticipation, which could potentially be remedied.

The stories also indicated that sustained part-time working mostly lead to uneven gender relations with their partners, and unequal division of family work, as partners progressed in their careers, and women became more entrenched as secondary earners with primary

responsibility for the home. There was little suggestion that participants were pushing for more help. Most reported having by now fallen into patterns of division, suggesting it was easier to divide and have certain responsibilities, than be continually sharing tasks out and negotiating (see also Beagan et al., 2008). By this stage, there was less of a sense of being over-burdened, compared to the constant juggling and time-squeeze of the early years (see also Crompton and Lyonette, 2008). Most partners were helping to some degree in the domestic work (see also Harkness, 2008), and the vast majority were represented as being 'involved' in parenting (see also Williams, 2008).

However, there were indications that this gendered division of labour was not fixed. For example, the cases of the three couples where the husband had stepped back to be around more during their children's teenage years. In these circumstances, the participants reported their husbands taking on a much greater share of family work – and two of the three women (Karen and Charlotte) had subsequently taken on more work. Furthermore, the division of labour did not appear to be rationalised by notions of 'pre-given roles' (Duncan et al., 2003), or 'transitional' values (Hochschild, 1990). Only the four women primarily using a narrative of *prioritisation* indicated anticipating putting family life first, and that this would involve taking on primary responsibility for the home. This was still constructed, however, as a *consequence* of part-time working and to 'be there' for their children, not out of a sense of responsibility to their partners as a 'wife' in a supporting 'role'. All four had experienced close relationships with their own mothers, who had 'been there' for them, which could have influenced their anticipation of following the same pattern. The other participants seemed to be more 'egalitarian' (Duncan et al, 2003) in their views, and five had specifically mentioned their feminist stances (focusing on gender equality) pre-children. Whilst the analysis revealed tension around feelings towards their gendered 'contribution', they too made sense of it through constructing it as a *consequence* of their part-time working, thereby resisting it being an orientation or preference. Steph and her partner were the only couple to share equally throughout, and Joanna and her partner did so for the first eight years. In both cases this was driven by their partners' political views on gender equality (see also Duncan et al., 2003), and facilitated by being in jobs that allowed them, as men, to work part-time (freelance graphic designer and social worker). Overall, the findings suggested the impact of sustained part-time working on gender relations at home was largely negative. However, they indicated that divisions of labour were neither fixed nor due to a gendered orientation – thus keeping open the opportunity for change. Importantly, if partners stepped back voluntarily in their work (to part-time or working flexibly from home) this led to them also taking on an equal or greater share of domestic labour.

9.3.1 Impacts of sustained part-time working on mother identity

Mothering stories were predominantly told as 'success' stories and the overall impact of sustained part-time working on mother identity was largely constructed as positive and a 'price worth paying' for loss of 'career' identity. This 'success' was more tentative for those with younger teenagers, but for many was from a position where children were starting to leave, and centred on the relationship they had in place for the (short) remaining time at home and importantly, for the future.

9.3.1.1 *Impacts mainly positive early on, but levels of tension vary*

The stories of Cara (5.2) and Sam (5.3) illustrated the divergent levels of tension found in the time/space of mothering young children, and the engagement with distinct narratives of *struggle* (Cara) and *prioritisation* (Sam). This was discussed in the context of the other stories in 6.2. Seven mothers were engaging primarily with a narrative of *struggle* and a key factor heightening tension was found to be the demanding and inflexible organisational cultures and roles in which they worked, in for example, broadcasting, management consultancy and law. Their *struggle* to manage working and caring was illustrated through the highlighting of crises, times when they felt they had not been there 'enough', the pressure of juggling, and the suggestions of guilt and letting their children down, when late or unable to attend an event. They were struggling to keep the two spheres separate, and mostly, the crises were where the demands of work were spilling over negatively into caring and a sense of not being a 'good enough' mother (see also Elvin-Novak and Thomsson, 2001, Johnston and Swanson, 2007). This narrative was present, in conjunction with a narrative of *prioritisation* in nine further stories, with only four mothers primarily using a narrative of *prioritisation*. These findings underline the fact that 'going part-time' does not automatically provide 'enough' time and/or time when it is needed for mothers in demanding, professional jobs (see also Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010, Edwards and Robinson, 2001). Nonetheless, mostly participants were still positive regarding part-time working meaning they could 'be there' at least some of the time for pre-schoolers, and for many, after further readjustments, most of the time after school once their children were at that stage. 'Being there' was central to perceptions of 'good' mothering (see also Hays, 1996). As such, the findings broadly concur with literature that positions part-time working in a favourable light for early mothering (Bailey, 1999, 2000, Johnston and Swanson, 2006, Sigala, 2005, Vincent et al., 2004).

9.3.1.2 Positive construction as enabling 'good' mothering of teenagers

This life-stage perspective of considering the impact of sustained part-time working on mothers of older children was found to be a gap in the literature. Much of the work/family literature has focused on mothers of pre-school children or children under twelve, with some covering a range of ages (e.g. Elvin-Novak and Thomsson, 2001, Garey, 1999, Hochschild, 1997). Similarly, organisational research exploring part-time working has tended to either specify having a younger child (e.g. Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010), or been unspecific (e.g. Edwards and Robinson, 2001). In the literature on parenting adolescents, little attention has been paid to a distinction in part-time and full-time working hours. The stories discussed within the thesis converged at this stage regarding mothering older children and positioning sustained part-time working as *enabling* 'good' mothering (Cara's story in 5.2.2; Sam's story in 5.3.2; across the stories in 6.3).

This research concurred with suggestions in the literature that by secondary school children are becoming more independent. Indeed, this is the reason often given for focusing on mothers of younger children in work/family research (see Duncan et al., 2003). The mothers had not anticipated still feeling a need to 'be there' (see also Garey, 1999). They had been aware of the ups and downs of hormonal adolescents and anticipated difficulties in managing them, but had not considered needing to 'be there' after school. However, as their older children reached this age, they suggested they came to understand a shift in their children's needs from physical 'looking after' to emotional availability (see also Elvin-Novak and Thomsson, 2001), as issues their children were facing became more complex and emotional. The need to 'be there' to provide emotional support was found to be in tension with a need to 'let go' (see also Garey, 1999). The mothers proposed that having a close relationship was key to being able to 'tune in', but also to 'let go', with children feeling able to turn to talk to them when they needed to, that this could not be forced (see also Bowlby, 1988, Elvin-Novak and Thomsson, 2001, Lewis et al., 2007a). In the developmental psychology literature, this ties in with Stattin and Kerr's (2000) argument that in exploring links between lack of parental knowledge and problem behaviour, parental knowledge has more to do with adolescent disclosure than active adult surveillance. It also links into subsequent research exploring connections between self-disclosure and warm parental relationships (e.g. Fletcher et al., 2004).

A key finding was the linking of sustained part-time working with suggestions made by the participants that they were *better placed* for mothering teenagers than either full-time or stay-at-home mothers. 6.3.2 outlined the ways in which they constructed sustained part-time working as *enabling* 'good' mothering, for example, the perceived importance of

time invested in the past and linking school-day time to protecting family time. In particular, participants represented time after school as important, as unhurried time to 'tune in' and make themselves available. They highlighted that if they worked full-time their children would be 'latchkey kids', on their own every afternoon (at this stage it is not about alternative childcare). There was also mention of the mental capacity required to providing emotional support, something that might be jeopardised by a full-time 'career' focus. Lewis's (2007a) study on letting go and perceptions of risk in parenting adolescents did not generally distinguish between part and full-time working mothers, but did note that part-time working mothers made sense of 'being there' after school by linking this with 'picking up' on issues. The lack of attention to this life-stage in the work/family literature is potentially linked to an assumption that teenagers are independent enough to be on their own after school (Duncan et al., 2003). The suggestion in this thesis that there may be benefits to teenagers' wellbeing resulting from their mother working part-time prompts the need for further investigation (9.4). This research also unsettles the assumption that staying at home is consistent with 'ideal' mothering as proposed in Hays' (1996) 'intensive mothering' ideology – at this life stage. According to these stories, stay-at-home mothers of teenagers could be positioned as too focused on their children and not giving them enough space. Consistent with Galinsky (1999) and Christensen (2002), whose studies asked the children themselves, the mothers in this study suggested that some time alone was not generally problematic, was 'good' for teenagers and they liked to have some 'space'. They also referenced the importance of being a role model to their children as a working woman and of having an alternative source of fulfilment as the empty nest approached (see also Elvin-Novak and Thomsson, 2001).

9.3.1.3 Benefits to maternal wellbeing

A focus on this life-stage has also indicated that the mothers were positively constructing the impact of sustained part-time working on their maternal wellbeing. Their storytelling suggested a deep sense of enjoyment and fulfilment from 'being there' at this stage, which was positioned as an unanticipated benefit in light of a discourse of 'difficult teenagers', and particularly if they had experienced a difficult relationship with their own mother (see also Johnston et al., 2008). It was not that it was *not* difficult, indeed many of the stories included anecdotes about issues with teenagers (e.g. Cara's, Ch.5). But part of being a 'good' mother at this stage, and deriving fulfilment from this, was constructed as being about seeing their children through difficulties and the inevitable ups and downs of adolescence and young adulthood. This contrasts with research with new mothers (for example, Miller, 2005), where difficulties can be associated with not coping and not feeling a 'good enough' mother. The stories stressed the *enjoyment* they derived from spending

unhurried time after school with their teenage children, emphasising not wanting to 'miss out' or 'mess up' at this stage, when time was precious, and they were nearing the critical juncture of children leaving home. 'Being there' at this stage also related to securing the foundations of their relationship for the future, with 'success' being associated with teenagers wanting to spend time with them and still seeing them as someone to turn to. This concurs with a dialogic perspective (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) on identity construction with regards to keeping an eye on the future and the importance of keeping open a possible future identity (Frank, 2010).

Whilst 'good' mothering was still focused on 'being there' and was still contradictory to the market, the findings from this research with mothers of teenagers differ from Hays' (1996) depiction of 'intensive mothering' in certain aspects. Firstly, the focus was on the relationship and the *mutual* benefits of enjoying each other's time and being able to talk openly. This represented a shift in their stories from early mothering where alongside the positives, there was more likely to be a greater sense of selflessness and references to boring, isolating and exhausting elements of mothering young children. Whilst they do still justify needing to 'be there' *for their children*, this is not positioned as being at odds with their own needs as mothers. Secondly, the stories no longer emphasised 'intensive' mothering in terms of effort, energy and time. Instead they suggested that key to connection and enjoyment was *unhurried* time and emotional availability. It did require a certain amount of time and mental capacity, but mostly it was construed as enjoyable, not as an effort, very different from the juggling and often time-squeezed depictions of early mothering and working (see also Crompton and Lyonette, 2008, Johnston and Swanson, 2007). Also, as noted above, *not* being there some of the time and having work and other things of importance in their life was conveyed as important for 'letting go' and encouraging independence. There was no longer a need to reframe time away as good for patience or to feel guilty about it (as per Johnston and Swanson, 2007).

According to the mothers, it was securing a close relationship with their teenage children and enjoying time with them that tempted the three fathers (Karen, Charlotte and Carol's husbands) to reduce their work. All three felt they missed out early on due to long hours and international travel and wanted to be around more now to make up for that. There was not a sense of this being due to a sense of obligation to 'be there' to care for their children, concurring with the literature on fathers that consistently suggests this is not a requirement of 'good' fathering (Braun et al., 2011, Vincent and Ball, 2006). Nor was it constructed as being in order to help out their partner or to allow their partner to focus more on work (although both Karen and Charlotte had taken up this opportunity).

There was generally little tension in the stories around fathers' contribution to parenting during this stage. Over time, the differential between mothers and fathers in hours spent with children has steadily decreased (e.g. teenagers staying up later), and the differential remaining (i.e. time after school) is constructed as enjoyable and mutually beneficial (rather than imbuing a sense of burden to be shared). The women were much more likely to use the term 'parenting' and much of what was described as 'parenting' was shared with fathers and could be described as working as a team, for example, negotiations about boundaries, giving advice or attending parents' evenings (see 6.3.1.3, 5.2.3 and 5.3.3). Importance was placed on 'doing' family (see also Morgan, 1996, Finch, 2007), through family meals and doing things with children during the evenings and particularly at weekends. Practically fathers were often helping with ferrying teenagers or in some families, helping or advising with homework. The vast majority were described as 'involved' parents (see also Williams, 2008) and enjoying 'close' relationships, particularly if they had shared interests.

9.3.2 Impacts of sustained part-time working on worker identity

Stories of working were ambivalent with regards to the impact of sustained part-time working on worker identities: on the one hand, the impact on 'career' identity can be conceptualised as a 'creeping trauma' and on reflection, damaging; however, the majority of women were engaging in a narrative of *reorientation*, illustrating possibilities in certain circumstances for *reframing* standards of 'good' working and the meaning of work within life more generally.

9.3.2.1 Impact on 'career' identity can be conceptualised as a 'creeping trauma'

As discussed in 9.2.1, stories indicated that during the early time/space of mothering and combining part-time work, 'career' identity was often on hold (Bailey, 2000), as mothers focused on their new mother identity and tensions relating to achieving 'intensive mothering' expectations (Hays, 1996), whilst maintaining work. For some, this was accentuated by drawing on a narrative of *struggle* (a dominant narrative for seven, and a significant one for all but four). This indicated they were *neutralising* rather than *reframing* career expectations, and were working part-time despite strong commitment to work (contrary to Hakim, 2004), positioning themselves as not having 'given up' or 'sold out' as some 'part-timers' were perceived to have done (see also Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). A notion of planning is considered key to a sense of 'career' (Li et al., 2001) and the fact that this was missing or disrupted in these stories is likely to have contributed to a growing sense of lack or loss of 'career'. The four women who identified with a *prioritisation* narrative suggested they had always *anticipated* prioritising family and

reframing career expectations, and this was constructed as enabling acceptance of putting their career on hold.

The stories indicated that recognition of loss of 'career' only came later. The trauma associated with the loss was therefore different to that experienced through a disruption to identity such as becoming a mother (see also Miller, 2005) or losing one's job (see also Gabriel et al., 2010). In the storytelling, tensions relating to 'career' started to rise up, as they resisted an increasing expectation to *resume* a full-time 'career' focus (8.2.1). Stories indicated that as university-educated, professional women, a 'career' *progressing* to senior roles was the expectation (see also Rose, 2005) and generally accepted marker of 'success' (see also Fineman et al., 2010). Part-time working appeared to be socially acceptable for mothers of young children (see also Smithson and Stokoe, 2005), but was felt to require greater justification as it was sustained with older children. Findings suggested multiple triggers of tension, coming together in different combinations (8.2). For example, if a first child had left/was leaving, this could instigate both reflection and looking forward to an empty nest, potentially prompting 'recognition' of 'loss' of career. Level of tension differed dependent on individual circumstances, for example, the extent to which they had compromised, or found themselves 'stuck', or were made to feel lacking or falling behind compared to colleagues or their partner. The nature of the participant's work or role and the organisational culture played a key role in determining the level of tension with 'career' expectations. Although their lack of (in a few cases, relative lack of) progression was experienced differently, all participants suggested having come to 'recognise' that their careers and career ambition had suffered as a result of sustained part-time working. In reflecting on this, and the fact that most were *reorienting* away from 'career', many came to refer to 'no longer having a career'.

Parallels can be drawn with Frank's (1995) illness narratives (3.3.3), suggesting the narratives are consistent with stories of 'damage' or 'loss'. Participants in this study indicated they had gone past the 'temporary derailment' of Gabriel et al.'s (2010) unemployed professionals and come to resist the expected *resumption* of a full-time career focus despite rising tensions relating to 'career', 'part-timer' and 'contribution' (8.2), turning instead to *reorientation*. Similarly, Frank (1995) talked of those living with illness often engaging with a notion of 'restitution' (a return to 'normal' or full health being the expectation for a life 'worth' living), but then turned to 'quest' narratives when they felt 'restitution' was no longer an option and compelled to resist it. In a similar vein to Frank's 'quest' and Gabriel et al.'s 'prompt for moratorium' narratives, *reorientation* narratives suggested the majority of women in this study came on to seek *alternative* means of fulfilment from work. Frank's 'chaos' narratives indicated an inability to make sense of

one's identity, where there appeared to be no future identity, so the story was in chaos. In this study, a few stories (e.g. Sara's in Ch.7) were more disrupted than most, but generally *disorientation* was a quieter voice, rising up in panic at certain points (occasionally resonating with fatalistic aspects of Gabriel et al.'s 'end-of-the-road'), but generally kept at bay by a stronger engagement with *reorientation* (e.g. Joanna's story in Ch.7). Concurring with Frank (1995), individuals tended to draw on all three, in different combinations, to negotiate telling stories of their lived experience. The parallels drawn here indicate these narratives are consistent with stories of 'damage' or 'loss'. However, the fact that the majority of women were engaging with a narrative of *reorientation* underlines the ambivalence detected regarding making sense of the impact of sustained part-time working on their worker/career identity.

9.3.2.2 *Reorientation: from 'career' to alternative means of fulfilment from 'work'*

Section 8.3 detailed findings relating to *reframing standards of 'good' working* and *reframing the meaning of work within life* in order to achieve fulfilment from work without 'climbing a ladder' or 'selling their souls'. Most participants were thus *reorienting* away from 'career' and resisting accepted standards (as professional women) of 'career' success (progressing in money and status to senior roles) and 'career' commitment (full-time). These findings resonate with Frank's (2005) notion of detecting 'moral impulses' and the struggle to discover what the 'contested standards of moral worth are', and 'which standards ought to apply to them at particular junctures in their lives' (p.972). Joanna's story in Ch.7 brought this to life, whilst the accompanying story of Sara illustrated a narrative of *disorientation* fighting with a desire for *reorientation*. Joanna's story, taken together with those of Judith and Jessica (8.3.1) highlighted the different ways women were combining reframed standards of 'good' working.

Firstly, these standards gave weight to *work as a source of self-fulfilment in itself* (see also Fineman et al., 2010) and to *intrinsic aspects of job satisfaction* (see also King, 2008, Rose, 2005, Walters, 2005). These could be enjoyed during the course of a progressing career, but the significance here is that they are given more weight as sources of fulfilment. All the participants indicated they would work whether or not they 'needed' to (see also Gallie et al., 1994). Judith's story (8.3.1) highlighted how this could take on added significance in the context of 'low-level' jobs. In agreement with Nolan (2009), reflecting agreement with this 'Lottery Question' does not fully appreciate their identification with work, but does give an indication of commitment (as per Houston and Marks, 2005). In terms of intrinsic aspects of job satisfaction, *doing a 'good' job* came across as central to fulfilment from work, and not being valued for doing so was hard to take (8.2.2). Ironically, by placing

more importance on this (in part also in resistance to 'part-timers' as lacking in competence and commitment), it could become part of the reason for not risking stepping back up. Appreciating this emphasis has clear implications for managing and developing part-time professional workers (picked up on in 9.4), as does the emphasis on other intrinsic aspects such as work being worthwhile, rewarding, varied, interesting or enjoyable. Strikingly, half the participants had *supplemented* their core job or role to achieve fulfilment through self-development, adding variety or doing something they found particularly worthwhile or satisfying. That they did so, rather than increase their hours or step up in their core jobs/roles, illustrates their *reframing* of standards of 'good' working and highlights where organisations are potentially failing to make the most of these women's skills and commitment. Taken together, these findings on reframed standards of 'good' working concur with Gabriel and Lang (2006) in contesting Bauman's (1988) suggestion of an abandonment of a 'work ethic' for a 'consumer ethic'.

A sense of *control over time* was also reframed as a core standard of 'good' working, allowing for the (little bit of) *flexibility* and '*space*' they had created. The stories indicated the effort put into making arrangements work, and the extent to which they now resisted giving this up. It was part of how they assessed the quality of their employment (as per Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003). Inherent in maintaining a sense of control over time, was resistance to the domination of work. In 'othering' full-time working and management (8.2), stories indicated a fear of being overwhelmed by long hours (see also Gambles et al., 2006) and/or highly stressful, intensive work (see also Burchell and Fagan, 2004), particularly if they had experienced this pre-children, as many had (especially the seven engaging with a narrative of *struggle* early on). Part-time working was constructed as core to allowing unhurried time and mental capacity for supporting teenage children, and also increasingly, other relationships and interests. This 'time' was valued more than resuming a 'career' focus at this stage.

In 8.3.2, evidence was drawn together of *reframing the meaning of 'work' within life*. This included reframing 'fairness' in moral rationalities of sustained part-time working and a shifting in priorities in life. Part-time work started out as a means to manage childcare and 'be there' some of the time, but over the course of the storytelling a shifting in priorities was detected. As well as a shift in priorities from 'career' to 'work' (as just discussed), the majority suggested that looking back, they had prioritised children over 'career', albeit this had not always been anticipated and loss of 'career' had been a progression (a 'creeping trauma'). Nonetheless, in reflecting back in concluding their storytelling, a moral rationality was often contained in having 'accepted' career loss rather than put at risk their children's wellbeing (illustrated well in Cara's story, 5.2).

Furthermore, staying part-time had resulted in unanticipated rewards as a mother (9.2.1), accentuating this acceptance and proposal that this had been a 'price worth paying'. These inter-related shifts also opened up a growing appreciation of fulfilment from other parts of life, in particular relationships and interests. Again, this was constructed as a progression, and an unanticipated benefit, appreciated through the *experience* of having 'space' during this time/space of mothering teenagers and working part-time (and thus, more apparent in the stories of those with older teenagers). This went beyond the notion of work-life 'balance' to include what having space, time and energy for other people and things increasingly meant for them in relation to their identity (beyond being a mother and a worker), and to question values and priorities regarding a 'good' life. Hence, for example, the value placed on having time for a cup of tea with an ageing neighbour (8.3.2.2). There are some echoes here with Grady and McCarthy's (2008) research with mid-career full-time working mothers, in terms of shifting priorities at this stage, the increasing sense of needing to include time for selves and the questioning of the meaning of 'work' within life.

Overall, the impacts of sustained part-time working on worker identity were found to be largely damaging to 'career', but also opened up possibilities for *reframing* standards of 'good' working and the meaning of work within life. This neither fits with Sennett's (1998) vision of 'corrosion of character' and lack of satisfaction from constantly chasing career opportunities, nor with Ritzer's (1999) proposal that people are exercising their freedom and flexibility to 'choose' lifestyles and identities through consumption practices. Aspects do, however, resonate with Gabriel's (2005: p.24) depiction of the complex ambiguities and contradictions as flexibility, consumption and individualisation collide – the 'distinct new 'constraints' and 'malaise', but also distinct new 'consolations' and 'possibilities for contestation and challenge' for identity construction', and particularly perhaps his suggestion of the 'powerful illusion of choice'.

9.4 Implications, limitations and considerations for future research

This final section of the thesis will firstly draw together the implications from the findings for feminist debates regarding combining working and motherhood (9.4.1). Section 9.2 has already critiqued Hakim's (2000) Preference Theory. It was argued that this research illustrated that 'becoming' a part-time mother was neither a free nor informed 'choice', nor a fixed orientation and was not simply due to a 'weaker' commitment to work – highlighting the fact that this opened up the opportunity for change. The impacts of sustained part-time working on mother identity (largely positive) and on worker identity (ambivalent), discussed in 9.3 will be drawn on to consider what changes might be called for and how these sit with and tie in with feminist debates. The final section will take into

account the limitations of this research and questions arising from it, together with considerations for future research.

9.4.1 Implications for feminist debates

Overall, this research points to supporting Hochschild (1997) and Fraser (2013) regarding their positioning of 'time' as a feminist issue and at the heart of what requires transformation for a more equitable future. Hochschild (1997) called for a 'time revolution' and Fraser (2013), more recently, for 'less labor for all'. Both are simultaneously tackling the issue of valuing time for caring and transforming notions of time within organisations.

Hochschild (1997) and Fraser (2013) propose that *care work and relationships* need to be valued, and these require *time*. The findings indicated perceived benefits to both children (6.3.2) and mothers (6.4, 8.3.2) of sustaining part-time working. Caring for children was positioned not simply as a constraint to be removed, but an enjoyable, fulfilling, important part of life. Nor were the stories just about avoiding work-life conflict, but about *valuing* time for caring and relationships and the rewards for all involved. The emphasis was on being there in person, to pick up on issues and connect with their teenage children. At this stage, the alternative would be for their children to be home alone in the afternoon and during the holidays and study leave. Hochschild (1997: p.221) described the emotional work of her participants to avoid the 'time bind', in the context of growing pressure to lead a more work-centred life. These included 'emotional asceticism', and 'detaching their own identities from what they might previously have defined as being part of a 'good parent'' (see 2.4.1). The US context is more pronounced in the way workplace culture and demands on time are increasingly overwhelming and transferring stress to family time, but Hochschild suggests the book 'lays bare' (2000; p.xxv) the costs of *not* valuing time for care work and relationships. This thesis has, on the other hand, illustrated some of the potential positives to families (including mothers themselves) of mothers working part-time during the teenage years.

Many feminists, in resisting notions of essentialist difference between men and women, have called for symmetrical equality in working and caring (see for example, Gornick and Meyers, 2003), but have come to recognise that simply focusing on removing constraints to women's full participation in work will not, on its own, achieve this. At the same time, men need to be encouraged to take on more care work. The findings from this research (albeit via the mothers' reporting) appear to concur with the literature in suggesting that the fathers were mostly more 'involved' than their own fathers had been (see also Williams, 2008), and the vast majority enjoyed spending time with their teenage children,

many reportedly having 'close' relationships. However, what seemed to be occurring was that fathers' involvement and closeness with their children was protected and perhaps even encouraged by mothers through invisible emotional care work (see also Erickson, 2005, 2011, Garey and Hansen, 2011). According to the mothers' accounts, their part-time working enabled them to pick up on issues their teenagers may have had and enabled their children to feel able to communicate (6.3.2). It was also suggested that their part-time working helped protect family time, for example, by taking on more of the domestic work (constructing this as 'only fair'), and often getting this done during the hours they were at home whilst their husband was at work (6.3.2). There was also some reporting of avoiding nagging or negotiation over domestic chores, in order to maintain family harmony (see also Beagan et al, 2008). These findings therefore suggest that a mother working part-time provided no incentive to their partner to consider taking on a greater role in care work. The two men that worked part-time during the early years did so out of a political belief regarding gender equality (see also Duncan et al., 2003), and a further two men who took on a significant share of the childcare during the early years, were able to make use of informal flexibility (see also Gregory and Milner, 2011b). Of particular interest were the three fathers who had chosen to step back in their work during their children's teenage years, in order to make up for lost time when their children were young, and this warrants further investigation (see 9.4.2). In these cases, it was reportedly a desire to establish close *relationships* that drove their decisions, rather than any sense of responsibility regarding practical aspects of care work.

Secondly, this research supports Hochschild's (1997) and Fraser's (2013) calls to transform *notions of 'time'* in relation to *work commitment, competence and productivity*. Again, this is not simply about removing constraints to 'choosing' shorter hours, but about *valuing* the commitment, competence and productivity of those who do. This is about removing discrimination against 'part-timers' and in doing so, removing the perceived need of part-time workers to hold themselves back and allowing a retention of self-confidence and potentially sense of 'career'. It is only through an acceptance that shorter hours and 'career' can coexist, that men might resist a long-hours working culture and steps could be taken towards reducing working hours for all. It may appear counter-intuitive to potentially further encourage part-time working, bearing in mind the largely negative impact of sustained part-time working on 'career' and on division of family work suggested by this research. However, it is important to keep in mind that these university-educated women had not 'given up' on work and had shown enormous commitment and effort in reorienting themselves. What the research appeared to highlight was that organisations were not utilising employees' skills and competencies, particularly

highlighted by half the participants supplementing their core roles or jobs in order to gain greater work-based fulfilment, rather than increasing their hours or stepping up a level.

Although not in the remit of this research to consider how this might be achieved, two areas to consider are implied from the findings. The first is the restructuring of measurements of performance, so that they are not focused on hours spent in work. In concurrence with Hochschild (1997), and others (Grady and McCarthy, 2008, Liff and Ward, 2001, Smithson and Stokoe, 2005) measures should focus on contribution, excellence and effectiveness. Employers need to be made aware of the extent to which they may be wasting employee skills by inappropriately using hours as a proxy for commitment (Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003) and missing the importance of intrinsic aspects of job satisfaction in the misplaced assumption that these are not important to 'part-timers' (8.3.1).

The second action implied by the research would be improving development opportunities for part-time working women by introducing a greater focus on career planning. A notion of 'planning' has been identified as core to a sense of 'career' (Li et al, 2002), whereas a lack of planning and anticipation was a persistent presence in the stories and part of what lead to women perceiving themselves as 'not having a career anymore'. Apart from anything else, the findings highlighted the need for young women to be made more aware of what part-time working could mean, so that options can be considered and plans made, from a more informed position. This research indicated that HR practitioners should be made more aware of a requirement to plan, and should take into consideration that working part-time or flexibly may extend and that this planning would need to incorporate some level of control over time for the employee. Literature has pointed to the negative outcomes associated with a low level of control, especially for women (Lyness et al., 2012). It has highlighted the positive benefits of mentoring in helping women plan and have a sense of direction (e.g. Noonan and Corcoran, 2004, Skinner, 2011, Skinner and MacGill, forthcoming). Durbin and Tomlinson (2014) have argued recently that a lack of mentors and the presence of negative rather than positive role models was found to be exacerbating a struggle to progress amongst mid-career, female, part-time working managers. There would be mutual benefits from more focus on planning for both employers and employees, with employers valuing and utilising part-time working mothers' skills and competencies, and the part-time working mothers being better placed to continue to develop and progress. Part-time workers being seen to develop and progress would in turn improve perceptions of part-time working, by evidencing the co-existence of shorter hours and career.

9.4.2 Limitations and considerations for future research

In this final section, limitations of this research are outlined together with how these might be taken into consideration for future research. Also included are findings that provide starting points potentially worthy of future investigation.

The dialogical theoretical stance and narrative analysis required giving space to stories, and this was also found to be important for illustrating the complexity of identity construction and negotiation. However, presentation of the stories often felt limited, particularly with attempting to manage twenty stories. A consideration for writing for publication would be to focus on a small number of stories. Slightly fewer cases could be considered for future research if following the same methodology.

Whilst extended to a second city following the pilot study, this research was still limited regarding its location in the South West. Other UK locations could, for example, provide more extensive or different employment opportunities, and more ethnic diversity. It would also be interesting to extend to comparative international research to explore this particular life-stage, using comparisons such as the Netherlands where there has been an increase in both partners working part-time, or Scandinavia with high levels of full-time working for mothers but in a policy context emphasising gender equality.

In recruiting for this research, a diversity of part-time jobs, roles, and part-time working patterns were achieved, as intended. However, this was clearly not representative and drawing implications from apparent patterns was avoided. It may be that in other kinds of jobs part-time workers have been more supported and encouraged to resume full-time, or proved too difficult to sustain part-time resulting in either resuming or dropping out. This would benefit from further quantitative investigation of longitudinal patterns of part-time working. For example, an extension of Connolly and Gregory's (2010), which followed a cohort of women, but only up to age 42 in 2000 - there have been three subsequent sweeps. Ideally, research would incorporate a deeper analysis of variations relating to type of work and organisational culture. In this research, half the participants were found to be supplementing their core role or job. This is at a higher level than might be expected from the literature (see 2.3.1), and warrants further quantitative investigation.

This research was particularly interested in part-time working and chose not to make this comparative in order to appreciate resonances across a variety of different jobs and types of part-time working. However, the suggestion in this research that part-time working mothers are *best* placed for mothering teenagers requires further investigation in the form of comparative research with full-time working and stay-at-home mothers. Research on

parenting adolescents could pay greater attention to distinguishing between the part and full-time working status of parents (i.e. not just whether they are working or not, or on a scale from not working to working long hours) and to looking at positive as well as negative spillover.

A focus on sustained part-time working and mothering older children has provided a fresh perspective on combining motherhood and paid work. Participants were chosen strategically to be partnered and heterosexual (in order to understand gender relations with male partners) and university-educated (the women most likely to have been able to make it to 'the top'). Since this was strategic, I would argue that this was not a limitation for this research. Nonetheless, there is plenty of scope to further the understanding of this life-stage perspective by extending to research with, for example, mothers who are no longer with the fathers of their children, and mothers on lower (household) incomes and/or with lower educational qualifications. This could, for example, take the form of a comparison of a number of strategically chosen social groups of mothers, distinguished by aspects of class, education, ethnicity, locality, partnership status, sexuality – as per Duncan et al.'s (2003) study, but amongst part-time working mothers of teenagers.

Findings relating to 'sharing' of parenting and domestic work with partners were included where appropriate to the objectives of this research with mothers and impacts on their identities. However, these could benefit from being more thoroughly mined, brought together and explored further in a separate paper. Furthermore, fathers' own accounts were missing and future research could explore their perspectives on working and parenting teenagers. This could either be done separately or together with partners. Of particular interest would be their perspective on relationships with teenagers and their responsibilities and aspirations as fathers, as well as their perspective on contribution to provision and care work at this stage. Also of interest would be further investigation of fathers stepping back in their work/careers during this stage – it is possible that potentially encouraging sequencing of caring and working may be one means of achieving greater sharing.

Research study with part-time working mothers

Is your youngest child at secondary school (aged 11-16)?

Did you work full-time before having children?

Are you working part-time, having predominantly done so since having children?

If this is you, and you might be willing to give up some time to tell me your stories about part-time working and mothering, please do get in touch. I am a mature PhD student at Bath University and have also been a part-time working mother for over 10 years. Email me (Fiona MacGill) at fm232@bath.ac.uk or phone 07801 847134 and I will fill you in further about the study.

This is an invitation to be part of a study looking at the impacts on identity and wellbeing of mothering and sustained part-time working.

Participation would involve:

- A one-on-one interview in two parts
- The first part would involve you being asked to look back over your time as a mother and part-time worker and relate your experiences
- The second part would involve discussing the stories told with the interviewer – filling in gaps, any reflections, any further thoughts
- Together, the two sessions are likely to take at least 2.5 hours and may take up to 4 hours to complete
- You may choose whether to do two separate sessions or one session with a break
- The interview session(s) would be arranged to take place at a time and in a location to suit you (day time or evening)
- No preparation would be required
- You will be sent copies of the initial analysis of your story and subsequently findings that focus on or draw on your stories and asked to comment on anything you would like to add, amend or remove
- Participation is completely voluntary, and you will have the right to withdraw at any time up until the final draft is submitted to the University
- The interview will be recorded, and the recording will remain confidential, only being used by the researcher for the purposes of analysis
- The recording and all other personal and contact details will be kept for no longer than is necessary

This study is being conducted as part of a PhD. The thesis will be published in full on-line, findings may be published in academic papers/books and headline findings may be published more broadly in the media. Names (personal, family, places of work) that could identify participants will be changed or omitted. However, since personal stories will be used in the findings, it may be impossible to keep a participant's identity hidden from someone who would recognise them from their life stories relating to mothering and working. I would encourage you to consider how likely it would be that anyone you know would read academic papers/books, and if so, whether this would be a problem for you. As mentioned above, you will be provided with copies of findings relating to your story, giving you the opportunity to remove any details you are uncomfortable with.

The participants during the pilot interviews for the most part found telling their mothering and working stories a positive, even cathartic experience. However, on occasion there was some emotional distress either due to issues suffered in the past that are brought up in the interview, or due to causing worry about the future. A list of organisations offering counselling or advice for parents, workers or relationships will be available after the interview.

Fiona MacGill, a mature PhD student at Bath University, will be conducting this research. I am also a mother who has worked part-time for 10 years. I would be happy to answer any questions you have about the project and to tell you about it in more detail. You can contact me on fm232@bath.ac.uk or on 07801 847134. I understand that I am asking quite a lot of participants and I would like to state how grateful I would be for your participation. Most research on mothering and part-time working has been from the perspective of mothers of young children. I believe it is important to ensure the stories of mothers of older children who are still working part-time are heard and understood.

Motherhood and Part-time Working Questionnaire

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Children's Age(s):
4. What level of education do you have? Please mark with an X:
CSE/O'level/GCSE [] A'level/BTEC [] Diploma [] Degree [] Masters [] PhD []
Other please specify:
5. How many hours do you usually do of paid work per week? Please mark with an X:
Less than 8 hours [] 9-15 hrs [] 16-24 hrs [] 25-29 hrs [] 30-34 hours [] 35+ hours []
6. Do any of the following apply to your part-time working arrangements? Please mark with an X:
Term-time only [] Flexi-time [] Shorter days [] Shorter week [] Some working from home []
Mainly work from home [] Please state any other part-time arrangements:
7. Please state if self-employed or name of current employer(s):
8. What is your current job (or jobs)?
9. Over the years since having your first child, roughly what proportion of this time have you spent:
a) Working part-time? []% b) Working full-time? []% c) Not in paid work []%
10. What was your job before you had children?
11. How many hours did you usually do before you had children? Please mark with an X:
Less than 8 hours [] 9-15 hrs [] 16-24 hrs [] 25-29 hrs [] 30-34 hrs [] 35-39 hrs [] 40-49 hrs []
50-59 hrs [] 60 hours + []
12. Do you currently have a partner?
13. Is your partner the father of your children?
14. What is your partner's job?
15. How many hours of paid work does your partner usually do per week? Please mark with an X:
Less than 8 hours [] 9-15 hrs [] 16-24 hrs [] 25-29 hrs [] 30-34 hrs [] 35-39 hrs [] 40-49 hrs []
50-59 hrs [] 60 hours + []
16. What is your total/joint income? Please mark with an X:
Less than £20,000 [] £20,000-30,000 [] £30,000-40,000 [] £40,000-50,000 [] £50,000-60,000 []
£60,000-70,000 [] £70,000-80,000 [] More than £80,000 []
17. What level of education did your mother have? Please mark with an X:
CSE/O'level/GCSE [] A'level/BTEC [] Diploma [] Degree [] Masters [] PhD []
Other please specify:
18. Did your mother work? If so, what did she do?
19. What level of education did your father have? Please mark with an X:
CSE/O'level/GCSE [] A'level/BTEC [] Diploma [] Degree [] Masters [] PhD []
Other please specify:
20. Did your father work? If so, what did he do?

This study is looking at the impacts on identity and wellbeing of mothering and sustained part-time working.

Participation will involve:

- A one-on-one interview in two parts
- The first part involves being asked to look back over your time as a mother and part-time worker and relate your experiences
- The second part involves discussing the stories told with the interviewer – filling in gaps, any reflections, any further thoughts
- Together, the two sessions are likely to take at least 2.5 hours and may take up to 4 hours to complete
- You may choose whether to do two separate sessions or one session with a break
- The interview session(s) are arranged to take place at a time and in a location to suit you
- No preparation is required
- You will be sent copies of the transcript of your story and later chapters or publications with sections that draw on your stories highlighted to comment on. This participation is important to ensure you are happy with the way in which your story is being told and will give you the opportunity to comment generally but also specifically on anything you would like to add, amend or remove. Please note, if you do not wish to respond that is fine. I will simply assume that the information is correct and you are happy with the way you are being represented
- Participation is completely voluntary, and you will have the right to withdraw at any time up until the final draft is submitted to the University
- The interview will be recorded, and the recording will remain confidential, only being used by the researcher and possibly her supervisor for the purposes of analysis
- The recording and all other personal and contact details will be kept for no longer than is necessary

This study is being conducted as part of a PhD. The thesis will be published in full on-line, findings may be published in academic papers/books and headline findings may be published more broadly in the media. Names (personal, family, places of work) that could identify participants will be changed or omitted. However, since personal stories will be used in the findings, it may be impossible to keep a participant's identity hidden from someone who would recognise them from their life stories relating to mothering and working. I would encourage you to consider how likely it would be that anyone you know would read academic papers/books, and if so, whether this would be a problem for you. As mentioned above, you will be provided with copies of findings relating to your story, giving you the opportunity to remove any details you are uncomfortable with.

The participants during the pilot interviews for the most part found telling their mothering and working stories a positive, even cathartic experience. However, on occasion there was some emotional distress either due to issues suffered in the past that are brought up in the interview, or due to causing worry about the future. A list of organisations offering counselling or advice for parents, workers or relationships will be available after the interview.

Fiona MacGill, a mature PhD student at Bath University, will be conducting this research. I am also a mother who has worked part-time for 10 years. I would be happy to answer any questions you have about the project and to tell you about it in more detail. You can contact me on fm232@bath.ac.uk or on 07801 847134. Thank you very much for giving up your time to take part.

I consent to taking part in this study on motherhood and part-time working, according to the conditions and reassurances as detailed on this consent form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Prior to starting the interview I will have gone through the consent form with the participant to check she is fully aware of what is involved and what she is agreeing to.

SESSION ONE

Thank participant for agreeing to take part and giving up her time.

Explain that there are no right or wrong answers in this kind of research – I am simply interested in hearing about her experiences and thoughts.

Also explain that we will take it at her pace - we can finish earlier if she has said all she wants to, or later, if needs be.

Start recording and reassure participant that it is only for my purposes and that nobody else will have access to it apart from my supervisor.

I would like you to tell me your life story, with particular reference to experiences of being a mother and working part-time. You can start as far back as you like or as feels appropriate to you. Tell me about your life and the journey you have taken, leading up to where you are now, as a mother and part-time worker. Don't worry if you jump around with your stories. I'm just interested in hearing about the experiences that happen to come to mind as you talk. I'll let you talk for now and will take a few notes. I might ask the odd question for clarification or to help keep your stories going, but otherwise I will keep my questions for the second session. I am just trying to make sure that I am not leading the way in which you tell me about your life. Don't worry if you run out of steam a bit here and there. Just take your time. Most people find they have a lot more to say than they thought they did.

SESSION TWO

The purpose of this session is for me to ask you to tell me a little bit more about certain aspects of your story and to ask about some other things that may or may not be important to your story.

Topics to probe on

Keep questioning as open as possible to encourage narrative/story-telling

You talked about xxx, can you tell me a bit more about that...

You mentioned xxx, what was that like?

Tell me about your experiences of...

Were any positive experiences of yyy and if so, can you tell me some stories to illustrate them?

Upbringing, education and dreams/expectations

Expectations/dreams early on and then later on – education and work

Story behind choice of FE/HE

Parental influence and/or approval

Expectations/dreams early on and then later on – relationships and children

Parental influence and/or approval

Working pre-children

Story behind starting out

Typical day

Highlights and lowlights

Being a woman in your job

Importance/meaning of work at this time

Changes in working life when settled down with partner

Becoming a mother

Story behind becoming a mother – planned and if so how

Life at home before went back to work

Best and worst experiences with new baby

Effect on how felt about self

Experiences vs expectations

Involvement of partner

Being a mother and going back to work

Expectations

Going back to work – good/bad experiences

Arriving at decision to go part-time

Going part-time – good/bad experiences

Managing childcare

Support from partner – emotional and practical

Sharing of domestic work

Support from other family members/friends/grandparents

Part-time working

Main transitions/changes
Patterns of part-time working over time

Successful part-time working
Disadvantages/difficulties – acceptable and unacceptable
Treatment by managers/peers/juniors

Experiences of career path
Opportunities for and barriers to training/networking/promotion

Experiences of fulfilment/reward from work
Positive and negative aspects of work

Current position and experiences
Importance and meaning of work today
Future plans/aspirations

Mothering & parenting

Main transitions/changes
Best and worst experiences at different stages (pre-school/primary/secondary?)

Mothering older children/teenagers
Experiences – good and bad
Typical weekday and weekend day
Mothering older vs younger children – aspects easier vs more difficult

Partner and his role as a father
Mothering vs fathering – your views vs your partner's
Experiences of being mothered and fathered – you and your partner
Sharing parenting – extent (primary/secondary/co) and in what ways

Reflections on being a mother
Experience vs expectation

Being a part-time working mother

Managing work today – as a mother of older children
Comparison to earlier stages
Advantages/disadvantages to your work of being a mother of older children

Managing family today – as a part-time worker
Comparison to earlier stages
Advantages/disadvantages to your home life/your children of being part-time

Sharing domestic work with partner and children – and changes over time
Partner's views on your working status – and changes over time

Other caring responsibilities e.g. parents
Being a part-time worker and life beyond caring for family

Plans for future when children left home regarding work/life

Reflections on changes over time

In this final section, I want you to think about the changes over time in terms of how you view yourself with regards to motherhood and work...

Views on mothering, work/part-time work, domestic work, feminism/equality:

Ways views have changed
Examples of changes in behaviour

Ways general perceptions have changed
Examples of general changes in behaviour

To finish up...

Stage in adult life felt happiest about who you are, where you are in life
And stage/times least happy

Surprises during process of looking back
Anything learnt about self
Ways different to what would have expected

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank and close

References

- ADAMS, A., ANDERSON, E. & MCCORMACK, M. 2010. Establishing and Challenging Masculinity: The Influence of Gendered Discourses in Organized Sport. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 29, 278-300.
- ANDERSON, E. 2009. *Inclusive masculinity: the changing nature of masculinities*, New York, Routledge.
- ARTHUR, M. & ROUSSEAU, D. (eds.) 1996. *The boundaryless career: a new employment principle for a new organizational era*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ARY, D., DUNCAN, T., DUNCAN, S. & HOPS, H. 1999. Adolescent problem behavior: the influence of parents and peers. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 37, 217-230.
- ATKINSON, C. & HALL, L. 2009. The role of gender in varying forms of flexible working. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 16, 650-666.
- ATKINSON, P. 1997. Narrative Turn or Blind Alley? *Qualitative Health Research*, 7, 325-344.
- ATKINSON, R. 1998. *The Life Story Interview*, London, Sage.
- BAILEY, L. 1999. Refracted selves? A study of changes in self-identity in the transition to motherhood. *Sociology*, 33, 335-352.
- BAILEY, L. 2000. Bridging home and work in the transition to motherhood: A discursive study. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 7, 53-70.
- BAKHTIN, M. M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin, University of Texas Press.
- BAKHTIN, M. M. 1986. *Speech genres and other late essays*, Austin, University of Texas Press.
- BAKHTIN, M. M. 1990. *Art and Answerability: Early philosophical works by M. M. Bakhtin*, Austin, Texas, University of Texas Press.
- BAUMAN, Z. 1988. *Freedom*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
- BAUMAN, Z. 1996. From Pilgrim to Tourist - Or a Short History of Identity. In: HALL, S. & DU GAY, P. (eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.
- BAUMAN, Z. 1998. *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Buckingham, Open University Press.
- BAXTER, J. 2000. The Joys and Justice of Housework. *Sociology*, 34, 609-631.
- BAXTER, L. 1990. Dialectical contradictions in relationship development. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7, 69-88.
- BAXTER, L. 2004. Relationships as dialogues. *Personal Relationships*, 11, 1-22.
- BAXTER, L. & MONTGOMERY, B. 1996. *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*, New York, Guilford.

- BEAGAN, B., CHAPMAN, G., D'SYLVA, A. & RAEWYN BASSETT, B. 2008. 'It's just easier for me to do it': Rationalizing the Family Division of Foodwork. *Sociology*, 42, 653-671.
- BECK, U. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London, Sage.
- BECK, U. & BECK-GERNSHEIM, E. 2002. *Individualization: institutionalised individualism and its social and political consequences*, London, Thousand Oaks California, SAGE.
- BECKER, G. 1991. *A treatise on the family*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- BELL, M. M. 1998. Culture as Dialogue. In: BELL, M. M. & GARDINER, M. (eds.) *Bakhtin and the human sciences: No last words*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.
- BERGER, M. T. 2004. *Workable sisterhood: The political journey of stigmatized women with HIV/Aids*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.
- BERR Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform May 2008. *Right to request flexible working: A review of how to extend the right to request flexible working to parents of older children*
- BERTAUX, D. & BERTAUX-WIAME, I. 1981. Life stories in the bakers' trade. In: BERTAUX, D. (ed.) *Biography and society: The life history approach in the social sciences*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- BIANCHI, S., MILKIE, M., SAYER, L. & ROBINSON, J. 2000. Is anyone doing the housework? Trends in the gender division of household labor. *Social Forces*, 79, 191-228.
- BILLIG, M. 1996. *Arguing and thinking: A rhetorical approach to Social Psychology 2nd Edition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- BIRCH, M. & MILLER, T. 2002. Encouraging Participation: Ethics and Responsibilities. In: MAUTHNER, M., BIRCH, M., JESSOP, J. & MILLER, T. (eds.) *Ethics in qualitative research*, London, Thousand Oaks, California, New Delhi: Sage Publications Ltd.
- BLAIR-LOY, M. 2001. Cultural constructions of family schemas: the case of women finance executives. *Gender & Society*, 15, 687-709.
- BOURDIEU, P. 1979. *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*, London, Routledge.
- BOURDIEU, P. 1990a. *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- BOURDIEU, P. 1990b. *The Logic of Practice*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- BOWLBY, J. 1969. *Attachment and Loss, Vol 1: Attachment*, London, Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- BOWLBY, J. 1988. *A secure base: clinical applications of attachment theory*, London, Routledge.
- BOYD, B. 2009. *On the origin of stories: evolution, cognition, and fiction*, Harvard University Press.

- BRAUN, A., VINCENT, C. & BALL, S. 2008. 'I'm so much more myself now, coming back to work' - working class mothers, paid work and childcare. *Journal of Education Policy*, 23, 533-548.
- BRAUN, A., VINCENT, C. & BALL, S. 2011. Working-class fathers and childcare: the economic and family contexts of fathering in the UK. *Community, work and family*, 14, 19-37.
- BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION March 2002. *Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association*. Available from: www.britsoc.co.uk/media/27017/StatementOfEthical/Practice.pdf.
- BRYMAN, A. 2008. *Social Research Methods*, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press.
- BUNTING, M. 2004. *Willing slaves: how the overwork culture is ruling our lives*, London, Harper Collins.
- BURCHELL, B. & FAGAN, C. 2004. Gender and the intensification of work: evidence from the european working condition surveys. *Eastern Economic Journal*, 30, 627-642.
- BURKITT, I. 1998. The death and rebirth of the author: the Bakhtin Circle and Bourdieu on individuality, language and revolution. In: BELL, M. M. & GARDINER, M. (eds.) *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.
- CHAMBERLAYNE, P., BORNAT, J. & WENGRAF, T. (eds.) 2000. *The turn to biographical methods in social sciences: comparative issues and examples*, London, New York: Routledge.
- CHODOROW, N. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley; London, University of California Press.
- CHRISTENSEN, P. 2002. Why more 'quality time' is not on top of children's lists: the 'qualities of time' for the children. *Children and Society*, 16, 77-88.
- COLE, A. & KNOWLES, J. (eds.) 2001. *Lives in context: The art of life history*, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- COLES, A. & KNOWLES, G. (eds.) 2001. *Lives in context: the art of life history research*, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- COLLINS, P. H. 1991. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment*, NY, London, Routledge.
- COLLINS, P. H. 2000. *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment*, NY, London, Routledge.
- CONNELL, R. W. 1995. *Masculinities*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- CONNOLLY, S. & GREGORY, M. 2008. Moving down: women's part-time work and occupational change in Britain 1991-2001. *The Economic Journal*, 118, F32-F76.
- CONNOLLY, S. & GREGORY, M. 2009. The part-time pay penalty: earnings and trajectories of British Women. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 61, i76-i97.
- CONNOLLY, S. & GREGORY, M. 2010. Dual tracks: part-time work in life-cycle employment for British women. *Journal of Population Economics*, 23, 907-931.

- CRAIG, L. 2006. Does father care mean fathers share? A comparison of how mothers and fathers in intact families spend time with children. *Gender & Society*, 20, 259-281.
- CRENSHAW, K. 1989. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139-167.
- CRESWELL, J. 1998. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five traditions*, London, Sage Publications.
- CRITTENDEN, A. 2001. *The price of motherhood: why the most important job in the world is still the least valued*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, LLC.
- CROMPTON, R. 2010. Class and Employment. *Work, employment and society*, 24, 9-26.
- CROMPTON, R. & HARRIS, F. 1997. Women's employment and gender attitudes: A comparative analysis of Britain, Norway and the Czech Republic. *Acta Sociologica*, 40, 183-202.
- CROMPTON, R. & LYONETTE, C. 2005. The new gender essentialism: domestic and family 'choices' and their relation to attitudes. *British Journal of Sociology*, 56, 601-20.
- CROMPTON, R. & LYONETTE, C. 2006. Work-life 'balance' in Europe. *Acta Sociologica*, 49, 379-393.
- CROMPTON, R. & LYONETTE, C. 2008. Mother's employment, work-life conflict, careers and class. In: SCOTT, J., DEX, S. & JOSHI, H. (eds.) *Women and employment: changing lives and new challenges*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- CROUTER, A., BUMPUS, M., MAGUIRE, M. & MCHALE, S. 1999. Linking Parents' Work Pressure and Adolescents' Well-being: Insights into Dynamics in Dual-Earner Families. *Developmental Psychology*, 35, 1453-1461.
- DE PEUTER, J. 1998. The Dialogics of Narrative Identity. In: BELL, M. M. & GARDINER, M. (eds.) *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.
- DELPHY, C. 1992. 'Mother's Union?'. *Trouble and Strife*, 24, 12-19.
- DENCH, G. 2009. Exploring parents' views. In: PARK, A., CURTICE, J., THOMSON, K., PHILLIPS, M. & CLERY, E. (eds.) *The British Social Attitudes Survey 25th Report*. London: Sage.
- DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION, 2014. *Improving the quality and range of education and child-care from birth to 5 years*. Available from: www.gov.uk/government/policies/improving-the-quality-and-range-of-education-and-child-care-from-birth-to-5-years (Accessed 18.08.14)
- DEX, S. & BOND, S. 2005. Measuring work-life balance and its covariates. *Work, employment and society*, 19, 627-637.
- DICK, P. & HYDE, R. 2006. Consent as resistance, resistance as consent: Re-reading part-time professionals' acceptance of their marginal positions. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 13, 543-564.

- DISHION, T. & MCMAHON, R. 1998. Parental monitoring and the prevention of child and adolescent problem behavior: a conceptual and empirical formulation. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 1, 61-75.
- DOUCET, A. 2004a. Fathers and the responsibility for children: a puzzle and a tension. *Atlantis: a Women's Studies Journal*, 28, 103-114.
- DOUCET, A. 2004b. 'It's almost like I have a job, but I don't get paid': Fathers at home reconfiguring work, care, and masculinity. *Fathering*, 2, 277-303.
- DOUCET, A. 2006. *Do men mother? Fathering, Care and Domestic Responsibility*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
- DOUCET, A. 2009. Dad and baby in the first year: gendered responsibilities and embodiment. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 624, 78-98.
- DOUCET, A. 2011. 'It's just not good for a man to be interested in other people's children': Fathers, public displays of care, and 'relevant others'. In: DERMOTT, E. & SEYMOUR, J. (eds.) *Displaying Families: A new concept for the sociology of family life*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- DUNCAN, S. 2005. Mothering, class and rationality. *The Sociological Review*, 53, 50-76.
- DUNCAN, S. & EDWARDS, R. 1999. *Lone mothers, paid work and gendered moral rationalities*, Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- DUNCAN, S., EDWARDS, R., REYNOLDS, T. & ALLDRED, P. 2003. Motherhood, paid work and partnering: values and theories. *Work, employment and society*, 17, 309-330.
- DURBIN, S. & TOMLINSON, J. 2010. Female part-time managers: networks and career mobility. *Work, employment and society*, 24, 621-640.
- DURBIN, S. & TOMLINSON, J. 2014. Female part-time managers: Careers, Mentors and Role Models. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 21, 308-320.
- EDLEY, N. 2002. The Loner, the Walk and the Beast Within: the Narrative Fragments in the Construction of Masculinity. In: PATTERSON, W. (ed.) *Strategic Narrative: New Perspectives on the Power of Personal and Cultural Stories*. Oxford: Lexington Books.
- EDWARDS, R. & ROBINSON, O. 2001. 'Better' part-time jobs? A study of part-time working in nursing and the police. *Employee Relations*, 23, 438-453.
- ELVIN-NOWAK, Y. & THOMSSON, H. 2001. Motherhood as idea and practice: A discursive understanding of employed mothers in Sweden. *Gender and Society*, 15, 407-428.
- EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION, 2005. Britain's Hidden Brain Drain. *Final report of the EOC's investigation into flexible and part-time working*. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.
- ERICKSON, R. 2005. Why Emotion Work Matters: Sex, Gender, and the Division of Household Labour. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 337-351.
- ERIKSON, R. & GOLDTHORPE, J. 1992. *The constant flux*, Oxford, Clarendon.

- EVERINGHAM, C., STEVENSON, D. & WARNER-SMITH, P. 2007. 'Things are getting better all the time'? Challenging the narrative of women's progress from a generational perspective. *Sociology*, 41, 419-437.
- EZZY, D. 1998. Theorising Narrative Identity: Symbolic Interactionism and Hermeneutics. *Sociological Quarterly*, 39, 239-52.
- FINCH, J. 2007. Displaying families. *Sociology*, 41, 1, 65-81.
- FINEMAN, S., GABRIEL, Y. & SIMS, D. 2010. *Organizing and Organizations*, 4th Edition, London, SAGE.
- FLEETWOOD, S. 2007a. Re-thinking work-life balance: editor's introduction. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18, 351-359.
- FLEETWOOD, S. 2007b. Why work-life balance now? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18, 387-400.
- FLETCHER, A., STEINBERG, L. & WILLIAMS-WHEELER, M. 2004. Parental influences on adolescent problem behavior: revisiting Stattin and Kerr. *Child Development*, 75, 781-796.
- FORD, J. & COLLINSON, D. 2011. In search of the perfect manager? Work-life balance and managerial work. *Work, Employment and Society*, 25, 257-273.
- FOUCAULT, M. 1978. *The history of sexuality*, Vol. 1, New York, Pantheon.
- FRANK, A. W. 1995. *The wounded storyteller*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- FRANK, A. W. 2000. Illness and autobiographical work: dialogue as narrative destabilization. *Qualitative Sociology*, 23, 135-156.
- FRANK, A. W. 2002. Why Study People's Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1, 109-117.
- FRANK, A. W. 2004. *The renewal of generosity: Illness, medicine and how to live*, Chicago, London, The University of Chicago Press.
- FRANK, A. W. 2005. What is Dialogical Research, and Why Should We do It? *Qualitative Health Research*, 15, 964-974.
- FRANK, A. W. 2010. *Letting stories breathe: A socio-narratology*, University of Chicago Press.
- FRANK, A. W. 2013. Introduction. In: FRANK, A. W. (ed.) *The wounded storyteller*, Second Edition, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- FRASER, N. 2013. *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, London/New York, Verso.
- FRIEDAN, B. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*, NY/London, W.W. Norton.
- GABRIEL, Y. 2005. Glass Cages and Glass Palaces: Images of Organization in Image-Conscious Times. *Organization*, 12, 9-27

- GABRIEL, Y., GRAY, D. E. & GOREGAOKAR, H. 2010. Temporary Derailment or End of the Line? Managers Coping with Unemployment at 50. *Organization Studies*, 31, 1687-1712.
- GABRIEL, Y. & LANG, T. 2006. *The Unmanageable Consumer*, London, Sage.
- GALINSKY, E. 1999. *Ask the children. What America's children really think about working parents*, New York, Willaim Morrow & Co.
- GALLIE, D., MARSH, C. & VOGLER, C. 1994. *Social change and the experience of unemployment*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- GALLIE, D. & ZHOU, Y. 2011. The changing job skills of female part-time workers in Britain 1992-2006. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 21, 28-44.
- GAMBLES, R., LEWIS, S. & RAPOPORT, R. 2006. *The myth of work-life balance: The challenge of our time for men, women and societies*, Chichester, John Wiley and Sons.
- GARDINER, M. & BELL, M. M. 1998. Bakhtin and the Human Sciences: A Brief Introduction. In: BELL, M. M. & GARDINER, M. (eds.) *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.
- GAREY, A. 1999. *Weaving work and motherhood*, Philadelphia, PA, Temple University Press.
- GATRELL, C. 2008. *Embodying Women's Work*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.
- GERGEN, K. J. 1991. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, New York, Basic Books.
- GERGEN, K. J. 1999. *An invitation to social construction*, London, Sage Publications.
- GERSON, K. 2004. Understanding work and family through a gender lens. *Community, work and family*, 7, 163-178.
- GIDDENS, A. 1991. *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in late modern age*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press.
- GIDDENS, A. 2004. Introduction. In: HAKIM, C. (ed.) *Key issues in women's work: female diversity and the polarisation of women's employment*. London: GlassHouse.
- GILLIES, V. 2005. Raising the 'meritocracy': parenting and the individualization of social class. *Sociology*, 39, 835-853.
- GILLIES, V. 2006. Working class mothers and school life: exploring the role of emotional capital. *Gender and Education*, 18, 281-293.
- GILLIES, V. & ALLDRED, P. 2002. The Ethics of Intention: Research as a Political Tool. In: MAUTHNER, M., BIRCH, M., JESSOP, J. & MILLER, T. (eds.). *Ethics in qualitative research*. London, Thousand Oaks, California, New Delhi: Sage Publications Ltd.
- GILLIGAN, C. 1982. *In a Different voice*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- GOFFMAN, E. 1971. *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.

- GOLAFSHANI, N. 2003. Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8, 597-607.
- GOLDEN, A. G. 2001. Modernity and the communicative management of multiple roles: the case of the worker-parent. *The Journal of Family Communication*, 233-264.
- GORNICK, J. C. & MEYERS, M. K. 2003. *Families that work: Policies for reconciling parenthood and employment*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation.
- GRADY, G. & MCCARTHY, A. 2008. Work-life integration: experiences of mid-career professional mothers. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23, 599-622.
- GRANT, L., YEANDLE, S. & BUCKNER, L. 2005. Working below potential: women and part-time work. *EOC Working Paper Series No 40*, Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.
- GREEN, F. 2004. Work intensification, discretion, and the decline in well-being at work. *Eastern Economic Journal*, 30, 615-625.
- GREGG, P., WASHBROOK, E., PROPPER, C. & BURGESS, S. 2005. The effects of a mother's return to work decision on child development in the UK. *Economic Journal*, 115, F48-F80.
- GREGORY, A. & MILNER, S. 2009. Editorial: Work-life balance: A matter of choice? *Gender, Work & Organization*, 16, 1-13.
- GREGORY, A. & MILNER, S. 2011a. What is 'new' about fatherhood?: the social construction of fatherhood in France and the UK. *Men and Masculinities*, 14, 588-606.
- GREGORY, A & MILNER, S. 2011b. Fathers and work-life balance in France and the UK: policy and practice. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 31, 1-2, 34-52.
- GUBRIUM, J. & HOLSTEIN, J. 2008. *Analyzing Narrative Reality*, Los Angeles, Sage.
- HAKIM, C. 2000. *Work-lifestyle choices in the 21st century: preference theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- HAKIM, C. 2003. *Models of the family in modern societies*, London, Ashgate.
- HAKIM, C. 2004. *Key issues in women's work: female diversity and the polarisation of women's employment*, London, GlassHouse.
- HAKIM, C. 2005. Sex differences in work-life balance goals. In: HOUSTON, D. (ed.) *Work-life balance in the 21st Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- HAKIM, C. 2007. Dancing with the devil? Essentialism and other feminist heresies. *British Journal of Sociology*, 58, 123-132.
- HALL, D. T. 1986. Breaking career routines: midcareer choices and identity development. In: HALL, D. T. & ASSOCIATES (eds) *Career development in organizations*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.
- HALL, D. T. 1996. *The career is dead - long live the career: a relational approach to careers*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

- HARDING, S. 1987. Introduction: is there a feminist method? In: HARDING, S. (ed.) *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- HARDY, B. 1968. Towards a Poetics of Fiction: 3) An Approach through Narrative. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 2, 5-14.
- HARKNESS, S. 2008. The household division of labour: changes in families' allocation of paid and unpaid work. In: SCOTT, J., DEX, S. & JOSHI, H. (eds.) *Women and Employment: changing lives and new challenges*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- HARKNESS, S., MACHIN, S. & WALDFOGEL, J. 1997. Evaluating the pin money hypothesis: The relationship between women's labour market activity, family income and poverty in Britain. *Journal of Population Economics*, 10, 137-158.
- HARRINGTON, A. 2008. *The cure within: A history of mind-body medicine*, New York, Norton.
- HATTERY, A. J. 2001. *Women, work and family: Balancing and weaving*, Thousand Oaks, California, Sage.
- HAYS, S. 1996. *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.
- HERMANS, H. 2001. The Dialogical Self: Toward a Theory of Personal and Cultural Positioning. *Culture & Psychology*, 7, 243-81.
- HERMANS, H. & HERMANS-JANSEN, E. 1995. *Self-narratives: The construction of meaning in psychotherapy*, New York, Guilford Press.
- HERMANS, H. & KEMPEN, H. 1993. *The Dialogical Self: Meaning as Movement*, San Diego, London, Academic Press, Inc.
- HIMMELWEIT, S. & SIGALA, M. 2004. Choice and the relationship between identities and behaviour for mothers with pre-school children: some implications for policy from a UK study. *Journal of Social Policy*, 33, 455-478.
- HOCHSCHILD, A. 1990. *The Second Shift: Working parents and revolution at home*, London, Piatkus.
- HOCHSCHILD, A. 1997. *The Time Bind: When work becomes home and home becomes work*, New York, Metropolitan Books.
- HOLLWAY, W. & JEFFERSON, T. 2000. Biography, anxiety and the experience of locality. In: CHAMBERLYNE, P., BORNAT, J. & WENGRAF, T. (eds.) *The turn to biographical methods in social sciences: comparative issues and examples*. London, New York: Routledge.
- HOLQUIST, M. (ed.) 1981a. *Glossary in Bakhtin, M. The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- HOLQUIST, M. (ed.) 1981b. *Introduction in Bakhtin, M. The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, New York: Routledge.
- HOLQUIST, M. (ed.) 1986. *Introduction in Bakhtin, M. Speech Genres and other late essays*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

- HOLQUIST, M. 1990. *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world*, London, NY, Routledge.
- HOLSTEIN, J. & GUBRIUM, J. 2000. *The self we live by: narrative identity in a postmodern world*, NY, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- HOQUE, K. & KIRKPATRICK, I. 2003. Non-standard employment in the management and professional workforce: training, consultation and gender implications. *Work, employment and society*, 17, 667-689.
- HOUSTON, D. & MARKS, G. 2005. Working, caring and sharing: work-life dilemmas in early motherhood. In: HOUSTON, D. (ed.) *Work-life balance in the 21st Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- INGLEHART, R. 1990. *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*, Princeton, N.J.; Oxford, Princeton University Press.
- JACOBS, J. & GERSON, K. 2004. *The Time Divide: Work, Family and Gender Inequality*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- JAMES, L. 2008. United by Gender or Divided by Class? Women's Work Orientations and Labour Market Behaviour. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 15, 394-412.
- JENKINS, S. 2004. Restructuring flexibility: Case studies of part-time female workers in six workplaces. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 11, 306-333.
- JOHNSTON, D. & SWANSON, D. 2006. Constructing the 'Good Mother': The Experience of Mothering Ideologies by Work Status. *Sex Roles*, 54, 509-519.
- JOHNSTON, D. & SWANSON, D. 2007. Cognitive acrobatics in the construction of the worker-mother identity. *Sex Roles*, 57, 447-459.
- JOHNSTON, D., SWANSON, D. & LUIDENS, D. 2008. Mother's work history in the construction of adult daughter's worker-mother discursive strategies. *Sociological Focus*, 41, 159-176.
- JOSSELSOON, R. 1995. Imagining the real: Empathy, narrative and the dialogic self. In: JOSSELSOON, R. & LIEBLICH, A. (eds.) *Interpreting experience: The narrative study of lives Vol 3*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- KELLIHER, C. & ANDERSON, D. 2010. Doing more with less? Flexible working practices and the intensification of work. *Human Relations*, 63, 83-106.
- KING, E. 2008. The effect of bias on the advancement of working mothers: disentangling legitimate concerns from inaccurate stereotypes as predictors of advancement in academe. *Human Relations*, 61, 1677-1711.
- KOURITZIN, S. 2000. Bringing life to research: life history research and ESL. *TESL Canada Journal*, 17, 1-35.
- LA VALLE, I., ARTHUR, S., MILLWARD, C., SCOTT, J. & CLAYDEN, M. 2002. The influence of atypical hours on family life. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- LAREAU, A. 2002. Invisible inequality: Social class and childrearing in black families and white families. *American Sociological Review*, 67, 747-776.

- LAWRENCE, T. & CORWIN, V. 2003. Being there: the acceptance and marginalization of part-time professional employees. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 24, 923-43.
- LAYARD, R. & DUNN, J. 2009. *A Good Childhood: Searching for values in a competitive age*, London, Penguin.
- LE BIHAN, B. & MARTIN, C. 2004. Atypical working hours: consequences for childcare arrangements. *Social Policy and Administration*, 38, 565-590.
- LEWIS, J. 2008. Work-family balance policies: issues and development in the UK 1997-2005 in comparative perspective. In: SCOTT, J., DEX, S. & JOSHI, H. (eds.) *Women and employment: changing lives and new challenges*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- LEWIS, J., NODEN, P. & SARRE, S. 2008. Parent's working hours: Adolescent children's views and experiences. *Children and Society*, 22, 429-439.
- LEWIS, J., SARRE, S. & BURTON, J. 2007a. Dependence and independence: perceptions and management of risk in respect of children aged 12-16 in families with working parents. *Community, work and family*, 10, 75-92.
- LEWIS, S. 1997. Family friendly employment policies: a route to changing organizational culture or playing about at the margins? *Gender, Work & Organization*, 4, 1, 13-23.
- LEWIS, S., GAMBLE, R. & RAPOPORT, R. 2007b. The constraints of a 'work-life balance' approach: an international perspective. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18, 360-373.
- LI, Y., BECHHOFFER, F., STEWART, F., MCCRONE, D., ANDERSON, M. & JAMIESON, L. 2002. A divided working class? Planning and career perception in the service and working classes. *Work, employment and society*, 16, 617-636.
- LIFF, S. & WARD, K. 2001. Distorted views through the glass ceiling: the construction of women's understanding of promotion and senior management positions. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 8, 19-36.
- LIM, H. 2011. The Life History Interview: Researching the dynamic identities of ethnic minority women in Britain. *Enquire*, 6, 1-23.
- LINCOLN, Y. & GUBA, E. 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*, London, Sage Publications.
- LUPTON, D. 2000. 'A love/hate relationship': the ideals and experiences of first-time mothers. *Journal of Sociology*, 36, 50-63.
- MACGILL, F. 2009. *A focus on part-time working mothers: a secondary analysis of young people's attitudes to work and family life*. MSc Dissertation: Bath University.
- MACGILL, F. 2010. *Mothering and sustained part-time working: impacts on identity and well-being*. MSc Dissertation: Bath University.
- MAHER, J., LINDSAY, J. & BARDOEL, E. 2010. Freeing Time? The 'Family Time Economies' of Nurses. *Sociology*, 44, 269-287.
- MANNING, A. & PETRONGOLO, B. 2008. The part-time pay penalty for women in Britain. *The Economic Journal*, 118, F28-F51.

- MATON, K. 2008. Habitus. In: GRENFELL, M. (ed.) *Bourdieu: Key Concepts*. London: Acumen.
- MAY, V. 2008. On being a 'good' mother: the moral presentation of self in written life stories. *Sociology*, 42, 470-486.
- MCADAMS, D. 1993. *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*, New York, Morrow.
- MCADAMS, D. 2001. The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 15, 100-122.
- MCADAMS, D. 2005. A psychologist without a country or living two lives in the same story. In: YANCY, G. & HADLEY, S. (eds.) *Narrative Identities*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- MCADAMS, D., JOSSELYN, R. & LIEBLICH, A. (eds.) 2006. *Identity and story: creating self in narrative*: American Psychological Association.
- MCCALL, L. 2005. The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30, 1771-1800.
- MCDOWELL, L., RAY, K., PERRONS, D., FAGAN, C. & WARD, K. 2005. Women's paid work and moral economies of care. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 6, 219-235.
- MCRAE, S. 2003. Constraints and choices in mothers' employment careers: a consideration of Hakim's Preference Theory. *British Journal of Sociology*, 54, 317-338.
- MEAD, G. H. 1934. *Mind, self and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist*, Chicago; London, University of Chicago Press.
- MILLAR, J. 'Work is good for you': *Lone mothers, children, work and well-being*. Third Kela Lecture, 2008 Helsinki.
- MILLAR, J., RIDGE, T. & BENNETT, F. 2006. Part-time work and social security: increasing the options. *Research Report No 351*. Department for Work and Pensions.
- MILLER, T. 2005. *Making sense of motherhood: a narrative approach*, Cambridge, The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.
- MILLER, T. 2007. 'Is this what motherhood is all about?': Weaving experiences and discourse through transition to first-time motherhood. *Gender & Society*, 21, 337-358.
- MORGAN, D. 1996. *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- MORSON, G. S. & EMERSON, C. (eds.) 1989. *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- NIELSEN, G. 1998. The Norms of Answerability: Bakhtin and the Fourth Postulate. In: BELL, M. M. & GARDINER, M. (eds.) *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.

- NOLAN, J. 2009. 'Working to live, not living to work': an exploratory study of the relationship between men's work orientation and job insecurity in the UK. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 16, 179-197.
- O'CONNOR, T. & SCOTT, S. 2007. *Parenting and outcomes for children*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- OAKLEY, A. 1972. *Sex, Gender and Society*, London, Temple Smith.
- OAKLEY, A. 2000. *Experiments in Knowing: Gender and method in the social sciences*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS, 2010. *More mothers working now than ever before*. Labour Market Survey, Office for National Statistics.
- PADFIELD, I. & PROCTOR, M. 1998. *Young adult women, work and family: Living a contradiction*, London, Mansell.
- PERRIER, M. 2012. Middle-class mothers' moralities and 'concerted cultivation': Class others, ambivalence and excess. *Sociology*, 0, 1-16.
- PERRONS, D. 2009. Women and gender equity in employment. Patterns, progress and challenges. *Working paper: WP23*. Institute of Employment Studies.
- PORTELLI, A. 1981. The peculiarities of oral history. *History Workshop*, 12, 96-107.
- PORTELLI, A. 1997. *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press.
- POTTER, J. 2005. Making Psychology Relevant. *Discourse & Society*, 16, 739-47.
- PUIGVERT, L. 2003. Dialogic Feminism: 'Other Women's' Contributions to the Social Transformations of Gender Relations. *Women and Social Transformation*. Peter Lang.
- RAPLEY, T. 2004. Interviews. In: SEALE, C., GOBO, G., GUBRIUM, J. & SILVERMAN, D. (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- REAY, D. 2000. A useful extension of Bourdieu's conceptual framework? Emotional capital as a way of understanding mothers' involvement in children's schooling. *Sociological Review*, 48, 568-85.
- REISCH, L. 2001. Time and wealth. The role of time and temporalities for sustainable patterns of consumption. *Time and Society*, 10, 367-385.
- RIDGE, T. 2007. It's a family affair: low-income children's perspectives on parental work. *Journal of Social Policy*, 36, 399-416.
- RIESSMAN, C. 2008. *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, CA, USA, Sage Publications.
- RILEY, S. 2003. The management of the traditional male role: a discourse analysis of the constructions and functions of provision. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 12, 99-113.
- RITZER, G. 1999. *Enchanting a disenchanted world: revolutionizing the means of consumption*, Thousand Oaks, California, Pine Forge Press.

- ROSE, M. 2005. Do rising levels of qualification alter work ethic, work orientation and organizational commitment for the worse? Evidence from the UK, 1985-2001. *Journal of Education and Work*, 18, 131-164.
- SALLINEN, M., KINNUNEN, U. & RONKA, A. 2004. Adolescents' experiences of parental employment and parenting: connections to adolescents' well-being. *Journal of Adolescence*, 27, 221-237.
- SAMMONS, P., ELLIOTT, K., SYLVA, K., MELHUISE, E., SIRAJ-BLATCHFORD, I. & TAGGART, B. 2004. The impact of pre-school on young children's cognitive attainment at entry to reception. *British Education Research Journal*, 30, 691-712.
- SAMMONS, P., SYLVA, K., MELHUISE, E., SIRAJ-BLATCHFORD, I., TAGGART, B. & BARREAU, S. 2007. Influences on Children's Development and Progress in Key Stage 2: Social/Behavioural Outcomes in Year 5. London: DfES/Institute of Education, University of London.
- SAMPSON, E. E. 1993. *Celebrating the Other: A Dialogical Account of Human Nature*, Hemel Hempstead, Simon and Schuster International.
- SCOTT, J. 2008. Changing gender role attitudes. In: SCOTT, J., DEX, S. & JOSHI, H. (eds.) *Women and employment: changing lives and new challenges*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- SENNETT, R. 1998. *The Corrosion of Character: the Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, New York, Norton.
- SHERIDAN, A. 2004. Chronic presenteeism: the multiple dimensions to men's absence from part-time work. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 11, 207-225.
- SHOTTER, J. 1992. Bakhtin and Billig: monological versus dialogical practices. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 36, 8-21.
- SHOTTER, J. 2005. Moving on by backing away. In: YANCY, G. & HADLEY, S. (eds.) *Narrative Identities*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- SHOTTER, J. & BILLIG, M. 1998. A Bakhtinian Psychology: From out of the heads of individuals and into the dialogues between them. In: BELL, M. M. & GARDINER, M. (eds.) *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.
- SHOTTER, J. & KATZ, A. M. 1999. 'Living moments' in dialogical exchanges. *Human Systems*, 9, 81-93.
- SIGALA, M. 2005. Part-time employment among women with pre-school children: organisations' cultures, personal careers and sense of entitlement. In: HOUSTON, D. (ed.) *Work-life balance in the 21st Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- SIMIC, M. & SETHI, S. 2002. People with second jobs. *National Statistics Feature*. Labour Market Division, Office for National Statistics.
- SINGH, V., BAINS, D. & VINNICOMBE, S. 2002. Informal mentoring as an organisational resource. *Long Range Planning*, 35, 389-405.
- SKEGGS, B. 2004. *Class, Self, Culture*, London, Routledge.

- SKINNER, T. 2005. Researching People in Power: Practice, Analysis and Action. In: SKINNER, T., HESTER, M. & MALOS, E. (eds.) *Researching Gender Violence: Feminist Methodology in Action*. Devon: Willan Publishing.
- SKINNER, T. 2011. Dyslexia, mothering and work: intersecting identities, reframing, 'drowning' and resistance. *Disability and Society*, 26, 125-137.
- SKINNER, T. 2013. How women perceive their dyslexia impacts on their mothering. *Disability and Society*, 28, 81-95.
- SKINNER, T., HESTER, M. & MALOS, E. 2005. Methodology, Feminism and Gender Violence. In: SKINNER, T., HESTER, M. & MALOS, E. (eds.) *Researching Gender Violence: Feminist Methodology in Action*. Devon: Willan Publishing.
- SKINNER, T. & MACGILL, F. (forthcoming). Combining dyslexia and mothering: perceived impacts on work. *Gender, Work and Organization*.
- SMITH, B. & SPARKES, A. 2008. Contrasting perspectives on narrating selves and identities: an invitation to dialogue. *Qualitative Research*, 8, 5-35.
- SMITHSON, J. 2005. 'Full-timer in a Part-time Job': Identity Negotiation in Organizational Talk. *Feminism & Psychology*, 15, 275-293.
- SMITHSON, J. & STOKOE, E. 2005. Discourses of work-life balance: negotiating 'genderblind' terms in organizations. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 12, 147-168.
- SOENENS, B., VANSTEEKISTE, M., LUYCKX, K. & GOOSSENS, L. 2006. Parenting and adolescent problem behavior: an integrated model with adolescent self-disclosure and perceived parental knowledge as intervening variables. *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 305-318.
- SOMERS, M. 1994. The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach. *Theory and Society*, 23, 605-649.
- STACEY, J. 1986. 'Are feminists afraid to leave home?' In: MITCHELL, J. & OAKLEY, A. (eds) *What is feminism?*, New York, Pantheon.
- STATIN, H. & KERR, M. 2000. Parental Monitoring: A Reinterpretation. *Child Development*, 71, 1072-1085.
- STENBACKA, C. 2001. Qualitative research requires quality concepts of its own. *Management Decision*, 39, 551-555.
- SULLIVAN, O. 2006. *Changing Gender Relations, Changing Families*, Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield.
- SUNDERLAND, J. 2006. 'Parenting' or 'mothering'? The case of modern childcare magazines. *Discourse & Society*, 17, 503-527.
- TAYLOR, C. 1991. The Dialogical Self. In: HILEY, D., BOHMAN, J. & SHUSTERMAN, R. (eds.) *The Interpretative Turn*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- THE PERSONAL NARRATIVES GROUP (eds) 1989. *Interviewing Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, USA, Indiana University Press.
- THERBORN, G. 1980. *The ideology of power and the power of ideology*, London, Verso.

- TILLY, C. 1996. *Half a job: bad and good jobs in a changing labour market*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press.
- TODOROV, T. 1984. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- TOMLINSON, J. & DURBIN, S. 2010. Female part-time managers. Work-life balance, aspirations and career mobility. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 29, 255-270.
- VALENTINE, G. 2007. Theorizing and Researching Intersectionality: A Challenge for Feminist Geography. *The Professional Geographer*, 59, 10-21.
- VANEVERY, J. 1995. *Heterosexual women changing the family: refusing to be a 'wife'!*, Taylor and Francis.
- VINCENT, C. & BALL, S. 2006. *Childcare, choice and class practices: Middle-class parents and their children*, London, Routledge.
- VINCENT, C. & BALL, S. 2007. 'Making up' the middle-class child: Families, Activities and Dispositions. *Sociology*, 41, 1061-1077.
- VINCENT, C., BALL, S. & BRAUN, A. 2010. Between the estate and the state: struggling to be a 'good' mother. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31, 123-138.
- VINCENT, C., BALL, S. & PIETIKAINEN, S. 2004. Metropolitan mothers: Mothers, mothering and paid work. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27, 571-587.
- WALBY, S. 2007. Gender (in)equality and the future of work. *Transforming work: Working paper series no.55*. Equal Opportunities Commission.
- WALL, G. & ARNOLD, S. 2007. How involved is involved fathering? An exploration of the contemporary culture of fatherhood. *Gender & Society*, 21, 508-527.
- WALLBANK, J. 2001. *Challenging Motherhood(s)*, Harlow, Pearson Education Limited.
- WALTERS, S. 2005. Making the best of a bad job? Female part-timers' orientations and attitudes to work. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 12, 193-216.
- WARR, P. 1999. A national study of non-financial employment commitment. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 55, 297-312.
- WARREN, T. 2010. Work time. Leisure time. On women's temporal and economic well-being in Europe. *Community, work and family*, 13, 365-392.
- WEBER, M. 1958. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York, Charles Scribner's and Sons.
- WEBER, M. 1978. *Economy and Society*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press.
- WETHERELL, M. 1998. Positioning and Interpretative Repertoires: Conversation Analysis and Post-structuralism in Dialogue. *Discourse & Society*, 9, 387-412.
- WHITE, M., HILL, S., MCGOVERN, P., MILLS, C. & SMEATON, D. 2003. 'High-performance' management practices, working hours and work-life balance. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41, 175-195.

- WILCOTT, S. & GRIFFIN, C. 2004. Redundant men: constraints on identity change. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 142, 53-69.
- WILLIAMS, F. 2005. A good-enough life: developing the grounds for a political ethic of care. *Soundings: a journal of politics and culture*, 17-32.
- WILLIAMS, S. 2008. What is Fatherhood? Searching for the Reflexive Father. *Sociology*, 42, 487-502.
- WORK AND PARENT'S TASKFORCE November 2001. *About time: Flexible working*.
- YANKELOVITCH, D., ZETTERBERG, H., STRUMPEL, B. & SHANKS, M. 1985. *A world at work*, New York, Octagon Books.